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A

S K E T C H

OF THE

D E B A T E S

I N

BOTH HOUSES OF THE PARLIAMENT
OF IRELAND,

O N THE

ROMAN CATHOLIC BILL

PASSED IN THE SESSION OF 1792.

CONTAINING

THE SENTIMENTS OF THE MOST ABLE SENATORS AS TO THE

PROPRIETY AND NECESSITY

O F

ADMITTING THE ROMAN CATHOLICS

T O T H E

FULL PARTICIPATION AND RIGHTS

O F

T H E S U B J E C T.

D U B L I N :

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1792.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONERS OF THE

BOARD OF PHYSICS

FOR THE YEAR 1900

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A

R E P O R T

OF THE

Debates in both Houses of Parliament,

ON THE

ROMAN CATHOLIC BILL.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 18.

ON the Order of the Day for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, to take into consideration a Bill to remove certain restraints and disabilities therein mentioned, to which his Majesty's subjects, professing the Popish religion, are now subject, being read; and on the Speaker putting the question, that he do now leave the chair.

Colonel Hutchinson said. As other Gentlemen have spoken at large on the principle of this Bill, I shall take the liberty of doing the same.—This great subject requires unequivocal, and decisive language:—I shall speak my sentiments upon it with the utmost submission, but with the utmost firmness; I may value your applause; but I should be unworthy of a seat in this House, if I could fear your censure, when I acted in conformity to the dictates of my judgment, after the best consideration I could give an important question—the opinions which on this night I shall mention, I adopted in early youth—my manhood has confirmed them; I am confident they are founded on the immutable principles of truth and reason; I shall therefore never cease to cherish them 'till I cease to exist.

Unfortunately for this country, those jealousies between Catholics and Protestants, which every good man hoped were buried in oblivion, are now rising again—I accuse no man either within these walls or without them, but I implore the attention of you all, and trust that this will prove a contest, not of passion, but of reason—not of prejudice but of argument: fears have been mentioned in this capital, and in this House, of dangers threatening the Protestant ascendancy; these sentiments have extended themselves to the utmost corners of the island, and have been reverberated back again to us.—Relying on the wisdom of this House, and on the moderation of the Protestants of Ireland, I will hope that this heated collision between the constituent and the representative body, shall never

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create

create a flame which may devour and consume this ill-fated country—I certainly have to regret that this great subject has not been canvassed with that temper which the investigation of truth and fair discussion naturally require; but as I do not feel these apprehensions, and cannot see any danger which could arise to the Protestant establishment from the further emancipation of the Catholic body, I must beg leave to state my reasons why I am of this opinion, and to answer several objections which have been made to the adoption of such a measure.

I shall vote for the committal of this Bill—the only objection that I can have to it is, that it does not go far enough;—it embraces four objects,—the right of taking apprentices, and of keeping schools, the power of intermarriages, and of being called to the bar—I really thought that a Bill so harmless, so innocent, so inoffensive—a Bill which gives so little, and that little so reasonable, might have passed into a law without objection and without debate.—The ingenuity of Gentlemen would probably have been at a loss, if the favourite topic of the Protestant ascendancy had not suggested itself—In this manner of reasoning, I acknowledge there is much philosophy and depth of thought: for the Protestant mechanic will assuredly find, the Protestant ascendancy in the monopoly of trade; and the Protestant School-Master will use his learning to discover this same ascendancy in the monopoly of teaching.—Beauty, honor, virtue, truth, might possibly in the person of a woman and a wife convince a Protestant husband, that though a Catholic was not to be trusted with power or office, a person of that religion might constitute the joy, the pride, the happiness, the consolation of domestic life.—If the law were a profession of less liberality, the Protestant barrister might search for this same ascendancy, in the depression of the industry and the abilities of his Catholic brother—Certainly the preservation of this ascendancy is the material object to which every other consideration must be sacrificed; yet still I am not able to divest my mind entirely of the idea, that the general prosperity of the great body of the people is something:—Impress with this opinion I would wish to annihilate monopoly; because I know that trade droops—I would give every man the benefit that might accrue from his superior knowledge, and promote learning by competition, because it is with difficulty to be found in this land; it has never taken root, but has languished for want of encouragement; or sought refuge in foreign and more congenial climates—I would suffer Protestants and Catholics to intermarry, because though the offices, the honors, the power, the authority of the State ought certainly to be in the hands of the few, yet I have heard and read that it is the union, and not the separation, the agreement, and not the dissention of the many, which must constitute the strength of the nation.—I would open the bar to them, because I would wish to call Catholic eloquence to the support of Protestant liberty.—great is the succour, great is the security, which countries derive from the possession of men of talents; they are their natural guardians, protectors and defenders; in bad times they shield the people against the encroachments and corruptions of bad governments, or interfere between themselves and their prejudices.

I hear with amazement the daily cant that the Catholic is not persecuted; because he enjoys his liberty and his property in as much security as the Protestant; but in my opinion every disability for religious belief is persecution.—It is buzzed in my ear, that every man in this House is as tolerant as I am, and that it is a contest for power and not for religion—it matters little to the world whether you change the name of things or not, provided the effect still continues the same—it may be contest for power but it is founded on religious difference—you may argue round the circle, but I still bring you back to the point of religion—For my part, I have not a mind sufficiently expanded to comprehend the force of this reasoning

reasoning—I cannot conceive the absolute necessity that Protestants should exterminate Catholics, or Catholics Protestants—may they not flourish together and divide this their country between them? Deny the position and you blaspheme the Common Father of both—I do allow that all these contests were originally contests of power—the Reformation was opposed by most of the Sovereigns of Europe, who thought it dangerous to their power that their subjects should use the light of their own reason, and that all habits of discussion, were inimical to despotism—the clergy availed themselves of their influence over a laity, ignorant and superstitious, and lighted up the fires of persecution, not because they feared God or hated man, but because they loved power.

It appears at first not a little surprising, that a difference of opinion among Divines, whether a text of Scripture ought to be construed figuratively or literally, should have created such animosities—the absurdity of such a cause of contest is lost in the immensity of mischief it has done—for think as you please, and say what you will, this is the difference, the real and substantial difference which has caused that immense separation between the Catholic and Protestant Church, which nor time, nor reason, nor philosophy have yet been able to close.

The oppression of Catholic Governments on their subjects who do not profess the religion of the State, has always been the object of the reprobation of the Protestants, and too often of their imitation—England has shared in this disgrace, but you have exceeded all other nations—your old sanguinary code still remains on your Statute Book;—inspect it again, if the tear of humanity shall not blot the pages and conceal from your sight the disgrace of your ancestors, and the oppressions and calamities of their fellow-subjects, and then if you are inclined for panegyric and self-applause, you may boast of the mercy and long suffering of the Protestant religion—but if you have been tolerant I do not know what persecution is—you refuse the Catholic toleration for his religion, arms for his personal defence, the right of purchase in the country in which he had been born and bred, and any landed security for his money—when with his industry cramped, his person in danger and his conscience in fetters, he retired to his house for comfort and relief, what were his feelings; what were his apprehensions? He found that the bloody spirit of your inquisitorial Legislation had entered before him, the suspicion which you had created dashed every joy of his life, and embittered every prospect of futurity—in his friend or his servant he saw an informer, in his wife the mother of him who might become his bitterest enemy and despoiler; the usual connections and gradations of human life were reversed: the parent was made to depend on the child, and not the child on the parent; the fondest parent surveyed with doubt and melancholy the opening talents of his offspring—he knew that if his son should prove valiant or enterprising, his country rejected his services, and that he must either pine at home in inactivity, or live an exile in a foreign country—if he should be wise or eloquent he could not raise his voice in those very courts of justice which were to determine on his property, his honour, his liberty, and his life, without a renunciation of the faith of his ancestors—So that a father in the bitterness of his anguish, was obliged to hope that his son should prove an idler, lest he should become an exile or an apostate.—I shall be told that the enlightened wisdom of a late Parliament did away some of those obnoxious laws; but it ought to diminish the exultation of your triumph, when you recollect that this repeal was opposed with much obstinacy and spirit, and that the downfall of the Protestant religion, and of the Protestant establishment was predicted, as soon as the Catholic body only should be restored to what will now appear to you to be the common and natural rights of men—When

therefore such has been your conduct, and such your legislation, you must acknowledge that persecution has been, and still is established by law amongst you—After such a degrading confession, is it any palliation to your offences, that other religions have adopted a conduct more ferocious than yours? have you no other defence to make for the honour of yourselves and your ancestors, for the wisdom of your government, for the dignity of your Parliament, for the justice of your nation, than that others have been more wicked than you? some of those nations have made an honourable reparation to the cause of injured humanity; if you followed their example when they were wrong, you ought not to reject it now that they are right—The history of christianity has not been very honourable to the professors of that religion; all sects of christians have been in their turns persecutors; they can only dispute concerning the quantum of mischief they have done.

In order originally to justify this penal code, it was found necessary to represent the Catholics as the enemies of civil liberty, and the constitution; as the adherents of a detested family; as holding doctrines erroneous, dangerous and wicked; all which circumstances rendered it unsafe for a Protestant government to place any confidence in them—you cannot now accuse them of holding doctrines dangerous to liberty, or of being enemies to the constitution; after you adopted them at Dungannon, after you enrolled them among your volunteers, after you marched embodied together, to commerce and to constitution—whether in later times they have been the adherents of the expelled families, their conduct for a century, during which period two rebellions raged in England, best can answer; whether they ever held or continued to hold these wicked, dangerous, and erroneous positions—such as that faith was not to be kept with heretics, that persons might be absolved from their oath, and that princes excommunicated by the pope might be deposed and murdered by their subjects—let your wisdom your candour and your truth pronounce, after you have considered that these doctrines were never received or acknowledged by any Catholic church, and have lately been solemnly denied, rejected and abjured by the principal universities of Europe, by those of that persuasion in England, and not now maintained by any, the most grovelling papist.

It is stated, if not as a crime, at least as an insuperable objection to Catholics, that their ancestors once possess the government, and the property of this country—during that period your candour must induce you to acknowledge that they often resisted the encroachments of England, and endeavoured to assert and maintain the independence of their Legislature—the rebellion of Forty-one, and the revolution, deprived them of all power, and in a great degree, with some few exceptions, of property: the power and the property were transferred to Protestant hands; it is argued, that if the Catholics should ever acquire sufficient weight in the government, they will overturn this settlement, and restore this property to the original proprietors—this fear appears to me to be imaginary, when all the circumstances are weighed without passion, and without prejudice—The first of these forfeitures is in the possession of Protestants for near a century and a half, the latter a century—the families of many of the original proprietors are extinct, or their representatives foreigners, residing in foreign countries—the Catholics themselves have purchased some of these estates, and will probably in course of time purchase many more of them; they have lent their money on this security; it never can be the interest of the great body of that persuasion to excite a general convulsion, in which their fortunes and the fruits of their industry might be swallowed up, solely for the purpose of benefiting the few—A nation is not to be put in motion, except by grievances which are severely felt by the whole mass of the community, and by causes which are of general

not of partial operation—The great share of property would still be in the Protestant hands; and property gives power—the disposal of office would still be in the Protestant government, and office gives influence, the command of the Irish army would still belong to you—the navy, the land force, the formidable and illustrious names of Britain, together with ten millions of Protestants would still be at your back—let me ask you then, is your situation so critical and so dangerous, that you dare not be just.

It is possible, I allow, that the hard necessity of the times, the prevalence of bigotry, and superstition, and the unenlightened spirit of the age, which rejected all principles of toleration, might once have palliated those laws; but if they were necessary in a period of comparative darkness, in a period of discord, revolution and blood, ought they to be continued when these causes, which originally might have justified them, have long since ceased to operate? Posterity, when it shall weigh in a just and impartial balance, the merits and demerits of the different generations which have gone before them, shall consider the enacting of this code, as the misfortune of your ancestors, but the continuance of it, as your disgrace—He may be a zealous Protestant, but he is not a zealous advocate for truth, who is unwilling to acknowledge, that the sentiments of mankind on the subject of religious differences have materially changed, and that all the circumstances attending these contests in Ireland, are exactly the reverse of what they were.—The spirit of the Catholic religion is softened and refined; the influence of the Pope, feeble, as the feeble and decrepid hand that wields it; his power overthrown in France, tottering in Germany, resisted in Italy, and formidable no where.—The succession is now undisputed, all ranks and religions vying in their attachment to the present family on the throne; we are not now cursed with a pretender to our crown, who was supported by a great body of adherents in England, and in Scotland, and by the whole force of the most mighty monarch in Europe.—In some sequestered corner of the land, among the old women of the island there may possibly still exist a Jacobite—Danger no longer threatens you; peace smiles upon you; why then do you still continue to sound the trumpet of war?

Examine well your own situation, and the situation of surrounding Europe. Reflect that this is an age of reason—Men seriously consider and speculate upon the various duties and obligations of government—Old establishments are no longer to be defended by their rust and antiquity, but by truth and reason—Try your penal code by this criterion, and he must be stupid indeed who is not able to find an answer for all your assertions—Your clamours and your prejudices, your high sounding expressions and your tones of authority may frighten the timid, but they will neither silence the bold, nor convince the reasonable—I am told that under this system of government, the country has thriven, and is still in a state of rapid improvement and prosperity—True it is, the vices of your political constitution have not been able entirely to blast the gifts of providence, they have only checked their growth, and retarded their progress; but a people possessing such energy of character as to be able to fight up against such oppressions, surely deserve more favorable treatment—Are they unfit for liberty, because slavery itself has only been able to deface, and not intirely to destroy the native and inherent vigour of their minds? There is I suppose no man who now contends that a Catholic is not as fit for, and does not love liberty as much as a Protestant—But it has been said that the Irish Catholic is a bigot, ignorant and superstitious, who does not deserve freedom, and who ought not to be trusted with power—You of the Protestant ascendancy breathe the same air, and inhabit the same country, and you are wise, free, and enlightened—from whence then does the degradation of the Catholic proceed? It cannot be from his religion.

religion, for the same cause would operate to the same effect, every where; and you must know that liberty, and the principles of government are now well understood in Catholic countries---This supposed degradation must then have arisen from that system of law which so many of you are now willing to defend-- let the Irish Legislator descend from his tribunal, and exclaim to his subjects, I have succeeded in disgracing and debasing you, I will continue the visitation, and punish you for crimes of my own commission.

I did hope that religious persecution, like every other periodical frenzy of the human mind, had spent its force, and was passing away---its progress has been cruel, ferocious and bloody; its duration six centuries!-- Philosophers in every country, together with America, Germany and France, have thought such a progress and such a duration were sufficiently degrading to the human character, and have therefore for ever chained to the ground this monster, which perverted a religion of peace, desolated the fairest provinces of the earth, and rendered man a wild beast---yet even in Europe, in enlightened Europe, this system has still its advocates in a country of liberty, among that very generation of men who established the independence of their legislature, and the freedom of their commerce--This inconsistency ought to make you blush, if religious zeal can blush--What! do you still cling to those terrible prejudices, which manacled your commerce, enslaved your people, and degraded your parliament? What! are you willing to shut your eyes against your own experience and to remain untaught by the wretched history of your wretched country? Do you not know, that it was your own internal divisions that first promoted a foreign usurpation; which caused the degradation, the oppression, the misery of this noble island, for which God has done so much and man so little? Reflect on the want of skill in your manufacturer on the small capital of your farmer---mark the appearance of your miserable peasant---see the wretched hovel in which he dwells---survey your country---ponder on the repeated insults offered to Ireland, on her profligate parliaments, on her commerce, once annihilated---on her constitution held in chains---examine well both the past and the present, and then if you are wise, you will find these effects accounted for, by the divisions which distracted you---If you are honest you will seize this opportunity of doing them away for ever---you will then, after the lapse of so many ages become again one nation:---for the Catholic will forget to be a bigot as soon as the Protestant shall cease to be a persecutor.

On the best consideration that I have been able to give this the most important of all subjects, I do not hesitate to declare, that you must prepare your minds for a radical reformation--I do not say exactly the manner or the time when, but sooner or later this system must fall to the ground, oppressed by its own weight--This necessity arose with the establishment of the independence of your legislature--you are willing after you have become a kingdom to cling and adhere to that narrow and wretched form of government which cursed a humiliated and distracted province--The thing is impossible--You are in the middle between the Irish Catholic and English Protestant--you must either adopt the one or unite with the other--you must either renounce your prejudices, or abdicate your legislative supremacy--Did you only seize on the scepter of dominion, in order to exhibit yourselves as a spectacle to the world, and prove that such feeble hands could not wield it? Would you rather go from nation to nation, begging a master, than form a compact of strength and perpetual peace with your Irish brother?

I have now stated to you my opinion on this question? a question of such magnitude that he must be a dishonest man indeed who could utter any sentiments that were not really his own; and he must be more than a coward.

coward, who, feeling strongly, should not dare to express himself in the same manner---I have done so, I thought it my absolute, and bounded duty---I know your fears and laugh at them---I am convinced of your prejudices, and I despise them---I cannot think of putting the fleeting opinions of any body of men, however respectable in competition with the dictates of my conscience, and the sacred interest of this my country.

I appeal from yourselves to your cooler reflections, in moments of less irritation---For my part I can see the prosperity of Ireland but in the union of all its inhabitants, and the union of all its inhabitants but in the adoption of the Catholic body---if it can arise from any other circumstance, convince me of it by arguments strong and irresistible---I will then acknowledge my error, and my renunciation of the principle shall be strong, explicit, decided, and sincere as the avowal.

Mr. Grattan, Sir, in rising to this question, I feel myself very peculiarly circumstanced, because I shall differ from the sentiments of a part of my constituents whom I highly respect; but in the part I shall take I feel that I shall more materially serve the true interests of the capital in general, than I should in complying with the instructions of a few; when the question is---whether three millions of loyal subjects are to be kept in a degrading subjection to a body of one million?---I will capitulate with no set of men on a subject where the interest, the justice and the prosperity of this country are at stake. I have on this question two objects: 1st, the Protestant.---2d, the Catholic. What is the condition of the latter? He cannot exercise his industry in any one profession---bar, army or navy; he cannot obtain a degree in physic; he cannot receive any education foreign or domestic; he cannot intermarry with a Protestant, and if a Protestant should by evasion marry a Catholic, she communicates to her husband the taint of disability; he cannot carry arms for his amusement or his defence; he cannot employ a Protestant servant to carry arms for him; he is bound without his consent, taxed without being represented, and is excluded from the political, civil, military and constitutional functions, to whose establishment he is made to contribute. You despise to tell the Roman Catholic that such a condition is a state of political freedom.---You have ascertained the value of those rights from which he is excluded. You have taught him that no human condition is supportable without political freedom; and that no man circumstanced like him is politically free. You despise to speak in the same country two languages. "These things are necessary for human liberty, but without these the Catholic may be free." He has in the course of the last 15 years been witness of three controversies on the subject of political freedom;---that of America---that of France---and that of Ireland: the lessons he has learned from them must be implanted in his breast for ever---His destination we must therefore allow is not that of freedom, and his sense of that destination we must suppose to be clear and decided. We have considered his punishment---let us now consider his offences---The Pretender is no more---that former bond of Catholic union, never the object of his hope, and now no longer the source of his despair, extinct, and with him the spring and passion, and apprehension of these laws. You will please to recollect that these laws, were made principally to guard the succession of the Crown against the followers of the house of Stuart, and that Catholicity was not so much the object of the penalty as the evidence of the attachment. The Pope---a name, driven out of his capital of Popery---France, unable to curse, scarce permitted to bless; without temporal, and now a suppliant even for spiritual authority---the type of the fall of bigotry, and a lesson to all dominant sects of Christianity, and to you among others, not to use their God as a scourge for their fellow creatures.---It is something, on a question touching the repeal of the penal laws, that the principal causes for which they were made---the one has

has expired and the other is expiring;—The Pope and the Pretender, France, that ancient head of Catholic league, vanished out of that confederacy, and propounding new systems of politics, and new principles of religion, fatal to bigotry either in church or state, and subversive of that slavery temporal and spiritual, at which for the last century we have been accustomed to tremble.—Whatever therefore may be the crime of the Catholic to ground a code of disability, there is one offence, of which he is not, and of which he cannot now be guilty—disaffection—because the object, and the resource of disaffection, and with them the principle itself, must have departed—His offence is therefore reduced to two heads—his nativity, as connected with claims of property—and his religion, as distinct from views of politics.—As to the first, he directly and immediately meets the charge: He denies that any such claims exist: he denies the possibility of their existence: he denies that he could benefit or you lose by the repeal of the act of settlement; he relies upon it that your title is, by time as well as by act of Parliament: he insists that a greater number of Roman Catholics take under the act of settlement, than could prefer claim on the repeal of it: that such claims, if any, are common to you, as your title under the act of settlement is common to him; and he offers you any assurance not only for your titles, which he reveres—but for your fears, which he respects; and he alledges that the whole Catholic body are ready and desirous to take the same oath to secure the act of settlement, which you have thought sufficient to secure the succession of the Crown. He desires you to name your own conditions and terms of abjuration, touching any imputed claim on this subject: thus the code of disabilities, as far as they are maintained on this ground, is reduced to an act of Power, which disables 3,000,000 of people for the untraceable descent of a few, grounded on the apprehension of claims imputed to that few which they cannot trace, which none make, and which all abjure.

I come now to the other head of offence:—his religion, as distinct from politics. I am well aware in questions of this sort how little religion affects their determination: however, we must not like ardent disputants, in the fury of the controversy forget the subject, nor in the zeal of the sectarist, lose all recollection of the Godhead;—it is necessary to remind you, that the Catholics acknowledge the same God, and the same Redeemer, and differ from you only in the forms of his worship and ceremonies of his commemoration; and that however that difference may be erroneous, it is not sufficiently heinous to warrant you in dispensing with the express and prime ordinances of your own religion, which enjoin certain fraternal affection towards all men, and particularly towards fellow-Christians whom you must allow to be saved, and are commanded to love: Admitting the principles of your religion in any degree to affect your determinations—you cannot suffer their prime injunctions to be cancelled by any ambition of the monopoly, or any views to the sole and exclusive profits of the State.—It is not sufficient to acknowledge the divinity of your God as an historic fact—you must feel his charities and attest your belief, not only in cheap and easy prayer, but in an animated practical philanthropy. You cannot say, speaking as mere Christians, 'tis true, God ordered these things, but if we complied, the Catholics would get some share of political power. You cannot thank your God for the redemption of mankind, and of these among the rest, and rise from your knees and inflict on his followers, temporal disabilities on account of their religion: we cannot exercise a political, practical atheism, in the name and on the behalf of our God: if we are justified in imposing disabilities on account of religion, all Christendom should have been disqualified until the 16th century; and even now the greater part of Christendom should remain disqualified—for the greater part

is Catholic—then our ideas on politics and religion compounded, would amount to this extraordinary proposition, that Protestants ought to inflict all over the world where they can, disabilities on the majority of the followers of Christ, who would thus stand in a strange predicament, objects to their brethren of perpetual proscription, and objects to our God, by the acknowledgments of those brethren, of perpetual salvation; and this situation would be the more inexplicable, when we maintain that our right to impose these perpetual disabilities arises from the superior benevolence and mildness of the Protestant religion;—we, therefore, arguing this question, merely on the ground of christians are driven to these straits, either to relax the principles of our code, or to surrender the principles of our code, or to surrender the principles of our religion.—Let us shut our eyes, however, to revelation and look to some other light for our justification; let us turn to the law of Nature—but surely we are led or betrayed by that light to revolt, at eternal disabilities imposed upon men for theological errors: the law of nature knows, nor physical, nor metaphysical, nor theological proscription: She imposes no precise standard of theological opinion: in her production many things are analogous—nothing is the same, not even in the vegetable tribe, still less in the workings of the human intellect, and least of all on a subject in whose contemplation that intellect is strained and exhausted, to justify disabilities on account of theological errors; we must therefore have recourse to some other law, than the law of Christianity, or the law of nations—we imagine we have found it in our own peculiar situation; that situation we state to be as follows: the Protestants are the few and have the power; the Catholics have not the power and are the numbers: but this is not peculiar to us, but common to all nations—the Asiatics and the Greeks—the Greeks and the Italians—the English and the Saxons—the Saxon, English and Normans,—the vanquished and the vanquisher—they all at last intermingled; the original tribe was in number superior; and yet that superiority never prevented the incorporation, so that this state of our settlement is not peculiar to Ireland, but the ordinary progress of the population and the circulation of the human species, and as it were the trick of Nature, to preserve by intermixture, from dwindling and degeneracy, the animal proportions. In some tribes it might have been otherwise, but they must have died, before they could reach history, a prey to their disputes, or swept off, by the tide of other nations washing them away in their little divisions, and leaving something better on their shore—solitude or a wiser people.

Had the English settlers, and the native Irish, been Pagans, they must have united:—Am I to understand that the Christian religion separates and sharpens the natural mildness of barbarous generations, and condemns men, to perpetual degrading casts, so that the errors of the Bramin are the wisdom of Christ. Ridiculous!—What then becomes of this argument, founded on the supposition of a peculiar situation? But here another principle is advanced, connected indeed with the argument of situation, the Protestant Ascendancy—I revere it—I wish for ever to preserve it, but in order to preserve I beg to understand it.

The Protestant Ascendancy I conceive to be two fold, 1st, your superiority in relation to the Catholic; 2nd, your strength, in relation to other objects; to be the superior sect, is a necessary part, but only a part of your situation—To be a Protestant state, powerful and able to guard yourself and your island against those dangers to which all states are obnoxious, is another part of your situation—In the one point of view I consider you as a victorious sect; in the other as the head of a growing nation, and not the first sect in a distracted land, rendered by that division, a province and not a nation. It would be my wish to unite the two situations—a strong state, with the Protestant at the head of it; but in order

order that the head of the state should be secure, its foundation should be broad. Let us see how far the Protestant Ascendancy in its present condition is competent to defend itself: Can it defend itself against a corrupt Minister?—Is the Protestant Ascendancy able to prevent oppressive taxes, controul the misapplication of public money, obtain any of the constitutional bills we have repeatedly proposed, or repeal any of the obnoxious regulations the country has repeatedly lamented?—There is in this House one man who has more power in Parliament than all the Protestant Ascendancy—I need not tell you, for you know already, as the Protestant parliament is now composed that which you call the Protestant Ascendancy is a name. We are governed by the *Ascendancy of the Treasury*. Let us try the force of the Protestant Ascendancy in the election of the people. A general election in Ireland is no appeal to a Protestant people, for they don't return the Parliament—The Protestant Ascendancy returns for corporate towns about ten or twelve members, the rest are returned nominally by corporate towns, but really by individuals. A general election in Ireland, and particularly since the sale of Peesages, is an increase of the strength of the Minister, and a decrease of the strength of the people; and by the people I mean the Protestant community. The Ascendancy, therefore, in elections, is not the ascendancy of a Protestant people—it is a *Ministerial and an Aristocrate Ascendancy*. Let us discuss your strength in other trials—You are weak against an Administration.—I know what you did in 79 and in 82; but I know in both those periods the Catholic acted in conjunction with you, and each period was immediately antecedent or accompanied by the repeal of part of the penal code: you are weak I say, against an Administration! How are you against an invasion?—Let me suppose that event.—I know some of you would say, we should stand between two fires. I do not believe it, but I do much apprehend, unless you relax your code, that we should stand between the fire of the enemy and the apathy of our own people. If the Catholic resorts to force or to threats he is lost, he has only to resort to your own laws to do you mischief, and in an obstinate and dutiful adherence to act of Parliament, to remain a disarmed spectator of the invasion of his country, unarrayed and unenlisted.

You must, however, in that event, arm them for your defence, as you did in the last, and proposed to do in the former war, and instead of repealing your laws for his sake, you must then break them for your own; but you will place little reliance on the languid battalion of an interdicted people—and then the unpopular Hanoverian—then the mercenary Hessian—then the unfeeling German must come and guard you with foreign mercenaries against your natural friends as well as your enemies.—A nation thus unable to protect itself without such assistance, becomes the easy prey of any Minister, and the British Government may say to the Protestants of Ireland, gentlemen, you are perfectly excluding from freedom three fourths of your people, but as they happen to be three fourths of your people 'tis impossible that your ill-fated country, even in your own instance, should expect all the blessings of the British Constitution. You, as well as the Catholic, therefore, must make allowance if your Government is somewhat arbitrary and exceedingly corrupt. Why do you murmur?—You have demanded liberty for yourselves, you have refused to it on another: we will, however, soften your situation—The Protestant shall enslave the Catholic, and the Minister shall coerce the Protestant, and thus we accommodate your religious distinctions.

There is another danger to which, or to the fear of which your divisions may expose the Protestant Ascendancy, I mean an Union; let me suppose the Minister, as he has often proposed corrupt terms to the Protestant, should propose crafty ones to the Catholic, and should say, you are three fourths of the people, excluded from the blessings of an Irish constitution;

tution; accept the advantages of an English Union—Here is a proposal probably supported by the people of England, and rendered plausible to at least three-fourths of the people of Ireland. I mention an Union, because I have heard it has been darkly suggested as the resort of Protestant desperation against Catholic pretensions—never think of it—The Protestant would be the first victim—There would be Catholic equality and Parliamentary extinction—It would be fatal to the Catholic also—he would not be raised, but you would be depressed, and his chance of liberty blasted for ever; it would be fatal to England, beginning with a false compromise, which they might call an Union, to end in eternal separation through the progress of two civil wars. I have stated three dangers to which your Ascendancy is exposed; let me suggest a fourth. The intermediate state of political languor whenever the craft of the Minister touches you in your religious decisions. The loss of nerve the decay of fire, the oblivion of grievances, and the palsy of your virtue, your harp unstrung of its best passions, and responsive only to notes of gratitude for injuries, and grace and thanksgiving for corruption.

From all this what do I conclude?—That the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland requires a new strength, and that you must find that strength in adopting a people, in a progressive adoption of the Catholic body—in such manner, and with such temperament as you have the Legislature in your hands may well devise, and such as shall gradually unite, and ultimately incorporate; but this will be better understood when I answer an objection made to the Bill before you, on a supposition that giving the Roman Catholic power in your country, you only enable him to subvert her establishment. By power must be intended interest, and then the argument will be, that if you give a man an interest in the State, you give him a disposition to destroy it, which is to attribute to the Catholic a passion for political suicide. Sir the objection assumes two propositions which cannot co-exist, that the Roman Catholic will have power arising from the repeal of disabilities, and the disposition arising from the continuation of them. Sir, the repeal of the disability is the repeal of the passion that grows from it. Gentlemen fall into a sad error when they suppose theological opinions for mankind into distinct political societies, as if there was a political society of Deists or Atheists, or of Free-thinkers; it is not the opinion but the penalty that forms the fraternity, disability is now the constitutive act, forming the Catholic into a distinct association; and the repeal of the disability is the act of its dissolution; I rely upon it that the progressive repeal of the disabling code must accomplish political conformity—the progress of affection is inseparable from the progress of the power; that power grows by slow degrees and states, in every stage dissociating the Catholic from his own sect, and associating him to your's; conforming him to your nature, and assimilating him to your strength, while he adds life and vigour to his own: to give capacity is one thing, to give enjoyment is another, and in every advance from the capacity to the enjoyment, a personal interference takes place, and animosity dies, and a conformity of mind grows on a conformity of interest—the soul of the one sect enlarges by the act of giving, that of the other by receiving, until each is depurated from the spleen of the controversialist, and both are enlarged into one people.

I speak of the nature of man—I speak of the affections inseparable from that nature. I speak of the great emotions of the heart and decisions at the head, and not of the momentary irritabilities of some nerves in the brain, whilst controversy stings for the hour, and for the hour only, unless a proscriptive law shall make the idle sensation eternal.

I apply to the present state of religion in Europe, and I deny that men act as religious combinations, except when they are interdicted. How do we ourselves? How do Protestants act? do we vote for instance,

as a religious combination under the direction of the Parson; or a Political combination for political interest; or a private combination for our own? How do Presbyterians act? do they vote as religious combinations at the Presbyter's beck; or for the Presbyterian candidate against their own landlord, and their own interest?

In other countries—America—do Catholics and Protestants, or Proteſtant and Catholic there act as religious combinations; under the diſtinct banner of prieſt or parſon, or as a ſolid combined maſs of people? Is n^t her infancy competent to inſtruct our age on this ſubject, and give us ſimple but auguſt and exalted inſtruction of morality, policy and wiſdom? France—does ſhe act as a religious combination? or are her Catholics and Proteſtants arrayed as diſtant clans of religioniſts? How do modern Proteſtants in England act? How do they act on the ſubject of religion?—A bill in 1775 paſſed the Parliament of Great Britain eſtabliſhing Popery in Canada.—How did a Proteſtant majority, how did Proteſtant Biſhops vote— as a religious or political combination? They voted for the bill, for the miniſtry— for the Popiſh religion. How have you acted lately?—A Viceroy Catholically affected and Catholically connected, is placed in the Government—How do Placemen, how do Biſhops act? They ſee his family, a very ancient and moſt reſpectable one, proceed to the Maſs;—are Proteſtants revolted—do they withdraw their ſupport—do the Biſhops reſiſt him—do the courtiers deſert him—do they act as a religious or a political combination? They vote for the Viceroy, for the Miniſter, for the place and for the penſion—let us come to the particulars of ſome part of this code—ſee whether the obſtacle to conformity is not in the law, that law for inſtance, that will not allow a Roman Catholic to hold a commiſſion in the army—What does it but forbid an opportunity of aſſociating with the Proteſtant, and a mild but compulſory means of conformity? 'Tis the meſs more than the chaplain: what can we ſay againſt admitting the Catholic officer, when we admit the Catholic multitude? Shall we ſay that the Catholic numbers, who from their pay can have no temptations, and from their education no information, and who are preciſely that deſcription of Catholics at whoſe arms you revolt, may with ſafety, and have been with great uſe admitted among your troops; and a Catholic gentleman, cannot be truſted with a commiſſion? Am I to underſtand that if Catholic officers were intermixed with Proteſtants they would model the regiment; and then with the aſſiſtance of Catholic lawyers ſhutting up the courts of juſtice by which the latter live, levy war againſt the British empire; In the ſame way the law preventing Catholics from coming to the bar, is another proviſion againſt conformity— a proviſion againſt aſſociation with Proteſtants; the Temple the fraternity of Club and Bar are more likely to produce conformity than the cloſet.—You have tried the force of ſtudy to convert mankind—try the pleaſure of the table, try perſonal inter- courſe, mere human means much more groſs, but perhaps more efficaciouſ—In the ſame way are our laws reſpecting the education ſo many proviſions againſt conformity; they exclude the Catholic in his docile years from our ſociety and our information, and enact that they from their earlieſt infancy ſhall live and learn only from one another; we ſend them and puniſh them for being ſent to foreign and Catholic countries to imbibe the principles of religion and politics; and then we make the prejudice of their education a reaſon for the continuation of their proſcription, proceeding in a ſucceſſion from cauſe to conſequence, and from conſequence to cauſe.

One defect in this bill is, that it does not open the University.—By virtue of this excluſion you prevent any man from the practice of phyſic, unleſs he gets his degree in ſome other univerſity: Here again your laws deprive the ſtate of another opportunity of conformity by perſonal inter-
courſe

course, and endeavour to deprive yourselves of health by the advantage of his science and medicine: Just so are the laws respecting marriages so many provisions against conformity, and a code for the refusal of their claims; no association by mixture of kindred; no admission of the same by intermixture of family. Each part of our laws are formed to preserve the cast, and to ordain Catholic blindness, and preserve exclusive rights to the clan and association. I disapprove much of that part of the law which leaves intermarriage subject to disfranchisement; you at once encourage, and you punish the connection; you encourage and you discourage, and you make yourselves the object of your severity, and stamp the marks of your own strength, and turn your prejudices against your own power and privilege.

I conclude this part of the subject by observing that the privileges we speak of do not give to the Catholic the power to fabricate the objection. Neither do they leave the disposition—They resort to political conformity as a means of political conformity—they employ political conformity as a further means of that conformity, and they give to many a man power by law to men who have a common interest by nature.

Another objection has been advanced against the repeal of the interdict founded on their imputed character—but character is not a disqualification—much less the character which the interdicting sect give to the interdicted. You do not disqualify the Tories because they are ambitious; nor methodists because they are mad—nor courtiers because they are servile. If imputed character was delinquency—the sword of the conqueror, the acrimony of the sectarian, and the tales of the nurse, would be the measures of your justice, and the laws of your country. The charge against the character of the Catholics resolves itself into two heads, a supposed predilection to arbitrary government, and a supposed idolatrous veneration towards their spiritual pastors. As to the first, Magna Charta is the answer—As to the latter, their present proceedings in Ireland, and the proceedings of other Catholics abroad are an answer. It is true the clergy have generally greater influence where the flock is interdicted, and the spiritual guide is by that interdiction, made the political head, and leader of party: but I forget; on this part of the subject we are silenced—Can we, who have enacted darkness by act of Parliament, reproach the Catholics with a want of light? We have forbidden their education, we are responsible for their ignorance: however ignorant some may suppose them, we must allow there are among them, some who can write, and we may suppose therefore there are some who can read. Let us take care how we press this part of the subject, lest the character which we give of the Catholic, the English should extend to the Irish in general, and give to both that degrading description which we give of one another: This objection is however strengthened, we are told, by the present publications and passions of the Catholics of Ireland: let me trace the history of those passions and publications—the first cause and origin was THE AMERICAN WAR.

America complained that she was bound and taxed without her consent—The Catholic complains that he is taxed without his consent—America said, a people taxed without their consent were slaves—The Catholics say, a people taxed without their consent are slaves—The friends of American liberty said, taxation and representation are inseparable—God hath joined them—no British Parliament can separate them—they applauded the passion as well as the principle—3,000,000 of men dead to all sense of liberty, would be fit instruments for enslaving England were the words of Lord Chatham—America has resisted—I rejoice says he, that America has resisted—but on this dispute the fiercest champion was Ireland—In 85, do you remember your discourses on the court addresses? the best argument in favour of the Catholic claims is, the defence by Ireland, and particularly by the Presbyterians of Ireland in
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favour of America—How did you at that time crush to shivers the little pretences of monopoly, and the frivolous pretences about the act of navigation, and so vile a peddling argument as the policy of empire, advanced against the eternal truth and original justice that clothed the half naked American, when he stood invincible on his great maxim—No representation, no freedom? The next occasion was your own Revolution; in your own case you had an opportunity of displaying yourself on this principle, and of exposing that ridiculous imposition, that would affect to set up civil liberty as compensation for the loss of political—You shewed the habeas corpus, trial by jury, rights of property, and rights of person, were nothing, if they depended on laws, in the making or repealing of which you might have no kind of concern. You instanced several examples in the commercial restrictions on Irish trade—and therefore you pronounced no civil, unless there is political freedom; the Catholic listened, and believed he caught the fire from your own lips, and now approaches you with your triumphant disquisition—It is an embarrassment, but an embarrassment which you must have foreseen with certainty, and you will govern no doubt with prudence—whatever you do, it is my humble wish that it may turn to the good of all, and your own in particular.

I conclude this part of the subject, by saying, as broadly and unconditionally as words can import, that the progressive adoption of the Roman Catholics does not surrender, but ascends the Protestant Ascendancy, or that it does not give the Catholic the power to shake the establishment of your constitution in Church or State, or property, neither does it leave him the disposition—it gives him immunities, and it makes Catholic privileges Protestant power:—I repeat the idea, and never did any more decide my head or my heart: my sense of public justice and of public utility—I repeat the idea, that the interdict makes you two sects, and its progressive repeal makes you one people—placing you at the head of that people for ever, instead of being a sect for ever, without a people, equal perhaps to coerce the Catholic, but obnoxious, both you and the Catholic, to be coerced by any other power—the Minister if he wishes to enslave, or the enemy if he wishes to invade you; an ill-assured settlement, unprepared to withstand those great diseases which are inseparable from the condition of nations, and may finally consume you, and in the meantime, subject to those intermitting fevers and pains, which shake by fits your public weal, and enfeeble all her determinations.

I have on this occasion submitted my genuine sentiments, if they differ from yours I lament it, and appeal to the wisdom of the next generation from the errors of their father—If they differ from those of some of my own constituents I lament it also—for I love them and revere them—but this is a question vital to you and to the Catholics in the present and everlasting condition of both. I cannot therefore, capitulate with any errors, founded however they may be on the best motives.—You think what I say is novelty—another age will think it plain and humble truth.—I sit down re-asserting my sentiments, which are, that further removal of disabilities is necessary—to make the Catholic a freeman and the Protestant a people.

Mr. Curran said, he would have yielded to the lateness of the hour, his own indisposition, and the fatigue of the House, and have let the motion pass without a word from him on the subject, if he had not heard some principles advanced, which could not pass without animadversion. He knew, he said, that a trivial subject of the day would naturally engage them more deeply, than any more distant object of however greater importance, but he begged they would recollect, that the petty interest of party must expire with themselves, and that their heirs must be, not statesmen, nor placemen, nor pensioners, but the future people of the country at large. He knew he said, of no so awful call upon the

justice and wisdom of an Assembly, as the reflection that they were deliberating on the interests of posterity. On this subject, he could not but lament that the conduct of the administration was so unhappily calculated to disturb and divide the public mind, to prevent the nation from receiving so great a question with the coolness it required.

At Cork, the present Viceroy was pleased to reject a most moderate and modest petition from the Catholics of that city. Their next step was to create a division among the Catholics themselves; the next was to hold them up as a body formidable to the English government, and to their Protestant fellow subjects; for how else could any man account for the scandalous publication which was hawked about this city, in which his Majesty was made to give his royal thanks to an individual of this kingdom, for his protection of the state? But he conjured the House to be upon their guard against those despicable attempts to traduce their people, to alarm their fears, or to inflame their resentments: Gentlemen have talked as if the question was, whether we may, with safety to ourselves relax or repeal the laws which have so long concerned our Catholic fellow subjects? The real question is, whether you can, with safety to the Irish constitution, refuse such a measure? It is not a question merely of their sufferings or their relief, it is a question of your own preservation. There are some maxims, he said, which an honest Irishman will never abandon, and by which every public measure may be fairly tried. These are, the preservation of the constitution upon the principles established at the Revolution, in church and state; and next, the Independency of Ireland, connected with Britain as a confederated people, and united dissolubly under a common and inseparable Crown. If you wish to know how these great objects may be affected by a repeal of those laws, see how they were affected by their enactment. Here you have the infallible test of fact and experience; and wretched indeed must you be, if false shame, false pride, false fear, false spirit, can prevent you from reading that lesson of wisdom which is written in the blood and the calamities of your country. Here Mr. Curran went into a detail of the Popery laws as they affected the Catholics of Ireland. He described them as destructive of arts, of industry, of private morals and public order, as extirpating even the christian religion among them, and reducing them to the condition of savages and rebels, disgraceful to humanity, and formidable to the state. Having traced the progress and effects of those laws from the Revolution to 1779: Let me now ask you, said he, how have those laws affected the Protestant subject and the Protestant constitution? In that interval were they free? Did they possess that liberty which they denied to their brethren? No, Sir, where there are inhabitants, but no people, there can be no freedom unless there be a spirit, and what may be called a pull in the people; a free government, cannot be kept steady or fixed in its seat. You had indeed a government, but it was planted in civil dissention, and watered in civil blood, and whilst the virtuous luxuriance of its branches aspired to Heaven, its infernal roots shot downward to their congenial regions, and were intertwined in Hell. Your ancestors thought themselves the oppressors of their fellow-subjects, but they were only their jailors, and the justice of Providence would have been frustrated, if their own slavery had not been the punishment of their vice and their folly. But, said he, are these facts for which we must appeal to history? you all remember the year One thousand seven hundred and seventy-nine. What were you then? Your constitution, without resistance, in the hands of the British Parliament; your trade in many parts extinguished, in every part coerced. So low were you reduced to beggary and servitude, as to declare, that unless the mercy of England was extended to your trade, you could not subsist. Here you have an

infallible

infallible test of the ruinous influence of those laws in the experience of a century: of a constitution surrendered, and commerce utterly extinct. But can you learn nothing on this subject from the events that followed? In 78 you somewhat relaxed the severity of those laws, and improved, in some degree, the condition of the Catholics. What was the consequence, even of a partial union with your countrymen? The united efforts of the two bodies restored that constitution which had been lost by their separation. In 1782 you became free. Your Catholic brethren shared the danger of the conflict, but you had not justice or gratitude to let them share the fruits of the victory. You suffered them to relapse into their former insignificance, and depression. And let me ask you, has it not fared with you according to your deserts? Let me ask you if the Parliament of Ireland can boast of being now less at the feet of the British minister, than at the period it was of the British Parliament? Here Mr. Curran observed on the conduct of the administration for some years past in the accumulation of public burdens, and Parliamentary influence; but, said he, it is not the mere encrease of debt it is not the creation of one hundred and ten placemen and pensioners, that forms the real cause of the public malady. The real cause is the exclusion of your people from all influence upon the representative. The question therefore is, whether you will seek your own safety in the restoration of your fellow subjects—or whether you will chuse rather to perish than to be just? Mr. Curran then proceeded to examine the objections to a general incorporation of the Catholics. On general principles no man could justify the deprivation of civil rights on any ground but that of forfeiture for some offence. The papist of the last century might forfeit his property for ever, for that was his own, but he could not forfeit the rights and capacities of his unborn posterity. And let me observe, that even those laws against the offender himself, were enacted while injuries were recent, and while men were not unnaturally alarmed by the consideration of a French Monarchy, a Pretender, and a Pope; things that we now read of but can see no more.—But are they disaffected to liberty?

On what ground, can such an imputation be supported?—Do you see any instance of any man's religious theory governing his civil or political conduct?—Is Popery an enemy to freedom? Look to France, and be answered. Is Protestantism necessarily its friend? You are Protestants, look to yourselves, and be refuted. But look further: Do you find even the religious sentiments of sectaries marked by the supposed characteristics of their sects? Do you find that a Protestant Briton can be a bigot with only two sacraments, and a Catholic Frenchman a Deist, admitting seven?—But you affect to think your property in danger by admitting them into the State. That has been already refuted. But you have yourselves refused your own objection. Thirteen years ago you expressed the same fear, yet you made the experiment; you opened the door to landed property, and the fact has shewn the fear to be without foundation.

But another curious topic has been stated again; the Protestant Ascendancy is in danger. What do you mean by that word? Do you mean the right, and property, and dignities of the Church? If you do, you must feel they are safe. They are secured by the law, by the coronation oath, by a Protestant Parliament, a Protestant King, a Protestant confederated nation.—Do you mean the free and protected exercise of the Protestant religion? You know it has the same security to support it. Or do you mean the just and honorable support of the numerous and meritorious Clergy of your own country, who really discharge the labours and duties of the Ministry? As to that, let me say, that if we felt on that subject as we ought, we should not have so many men of talents and virtues struggling under the difficulties of their scanty pittance, and feeling the melancholy conviction that no virtues or talents can give them any hope of advancement.—If you really mean the preservation of every right and every honor that can dignify a christian priest, and give authority to his

his function, I will protect them as zealously as you. I will ever respect and revere the man who employs himself in diffusing light, hope, and consolation. But if you mean by Ascendancy the power of persecution, I detest and abhor it. If you mean the Ascendancy of an English school over an Irish university, I cannot look upon it without aversion. An Ascendancy of that form raises to my mind a little greasy emblem of stall-fed theology, imported from some foreign land with the graces of a lady's maid, the dignity of a squire, the temperance of a larder, its sobriety the dregs of a patron's bottle, and its wisdom the dregs of a patron's understanding, brought hither to devour, to degrade, and to defame.—Is it to such a thing you would have it thought that you affixed the idea of the Protestant Ascendancy? But it is said, admit them by degrees, and do not run the risque of too precipitate an incorporation. I conceive both the argument and the fact unfounded. In a mixed government, like ours, an increase of the democratic power can scarcely ever be dangerous.—None of the three powers of our Constitution acts singly in the line of its natural direction; each is necessarily tempered and diverted by the action of the other two: and hence it is, that though the power of the Crown has, perhaps, far transcended the degree to which theory might confine it, the liberty of the British Constitution may not be in much danger. An increase of power to any of the three, acts finally upon the state, with a very diminished influence, and therefore, great indeed must be that increase in any one of them which can endanger the practical balance of the Constitution. Still, however, I contend not against the caution of a gradual admission. But let me ask you can you admit them any otherwise than gradually? The striking and melancholy symptom of the public disease is, that if it recovers at all it can be only through a feeble and lingering convalescence. Yet even this gradual admission your Catholic brethren do not ask, save under every pledge and every restriction which your justice and wisdom can recommend to your adoption.

Mr. Curran concluded with calling on the House to consider the necessity of acting with a social and conciliatory mind. That contrary conduct may perhaps protract the unhappy depression of our country, but a partial liberty cannot long subsist. A disunited people cannot long subsist. With infinite regret must any man look forward to the alienation of three millions of our people, and to a degree of subserviency and corruption in a fourth; I am sorry, said he, to think it is so very easy to conceive, that in case of such an event the inevitable consequence would be, an union with Great Britain. And if any one desires to know what that would be, I will tell him.—It would be the emigration of every man of consequence from Ireland; it would be the participation of British taxes without British trade; it would be the extinction of the Irish name as a people. We should become a wretched colony, perhaps leased out to a company of Jews, as was formerly in contemplation, and governed by a few tax-gatherers and excisemen, unless possibly you may add fifteen or twenty couple of Irish Members, who might be found every session sleeping in their collars under the manager of the British Minister.

On the question of rejecting the Catholic petition, Mr. Forbes spoke as follows:

Mr. Forbes—I rise to express my concern and astonishment at the favourable reception, which the House has this night given to an attempt to excite ridicule and contempt against the subscribers to the petition now under your consideration; whom both from the respectability of their characters, and their consequence in the commercial world, it is equally our duty and our interest to protect and cultivate.

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Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding this unfavourable disposition of the House to hear any argument against the motion for the rejection of this petition, I shall not hesitate to affirm that the mode of treating it which we are urged to adopt, appears to me not to be warranted by the usual proceedings of this House. I do admit that if the petition had been presented when there was not a full attendance, or if the substance and object of it had not been fairly and correctly stated by the member who introduced it; or if the House had in any degree been taken by surprise on the subject, it would not have been contrary to the practice of Parliament to have proposed the motion made by the Right Hon. Member; but the present case is directly the reverse of that which I have stated, this petition was presented in a very full House; and such precaution was used before it was received, that not relying on the usual correctness of the statements of the Hon. Member who presented it, the House required that he should read every word of the petition; and after being possessed of the object and prayer of it, unanimously resolved that it should be received and lie on the table. The friends of this motion profess that they do not intend any disrespect to the petitioners, but only adopt this measure, as a mode of declaring to them a fixed determination of not granting to persons of their description any participation in the elective franchise. I cannot conceive that such a material departure from parliamentary usage respecting a petition which does not militate against the privileges of the House, and is perfectly consistent with the privilege which all descriptions of our fellow-subjects enjoy, of petitioning Parliament for the repeal of any law of any nature or tendency whatsoever, can admit of any interpretation, but that of disrespectful treatment; and if we suffer the petition to remain on the table, without being referred to a Committee, and pass the bill now depending, without the insertion of any elective qualification, no person can deny that such a procedure must operate as a sufficient indication of our determination not to grant the prayer of that petition. I object to this measure, as it subjects the House to the suspicion of going out of their way to injure the feelings of their Roman Catholic brethren; and it militates against the great object of the Bill now before the House, the conciliation of the affections of the Roman Catholics, and the promotion of a firm and permanent union of all descriptions of people in this country, in support of the common interest of Ireland. If we advert to the conduct of the British Parliament, we shall find more respect shewn to American resistance than Catholic loyalty. Before the declaration of independence, the petitions of the Americans were never rejected by the Houses of Parliament; and even after that event, the petitions from Congress to the King were received by him, and afterwards laid before both Houses and taken into consideration; and yet the object of those petitions was to subvert the supremacy of the British Parliament.

Though I am adverse to the present motion, I do think that the Bill of the Hon. Baronet is sufficiently ample in respect to the advantages it purports to confer on the Roman Catholics; because I have always considered it most expedient that the extension of privilege to our Catholic fellow subjects should be gradual and progressive; thus every relaxation of the Penal Laws must operate as a temperate reform, without exciting the apprehensions of their Protestant brethren; but as the Members of the House are called on this night to speak out, I shall without any reserve declare, that according to the best judgment I could form on the subject, a farther extension of privilege or an admission of the Roman Catholics to a reasonable and moderate participation in the elective franchise, could be effected without endangering the Protestant Ascendancy, which I shall ever most zealously maintain;

tain; I conceive no farther declaration on this subject necessary, to evince the attachment to the Constitution, of a man, who has sacrificed more than any Member in this House in support of that Constitution, and the consistency of his public conduct. Yet as the decided opinion of the House, and the present temper of the Protestants of Ireland are adverse to the adoption of such a measure at this period, I am certain that the Roman Catholics will submit with that respectful deference, which they have so repeatedly testified for the determinations of the Legislature of this kingdom, and the wishes of their Protestant brethren; reposing a well-founded confidence, I trust, in that growth of public sentiment in their favour which, I am happy to observe, by a fortunate concurrence of circumstances is daily accelerating; but in order to inspire precaution in some Gentlemen, who appear to act at present under the influence of their apprehensions for the safety of the Protestant Ascendancy, I beg leave to remind them that they were actuated by the same apprehensions in 1778, when they opposed a Bill at that time introduced into this House for the relaxation of the Penal Laws against Catholics; yet experience has since proved that those apprehensions were groundless; and Gentlemen who in 1778 resisted the measure of enabling Roman Catholics to acquire estates in fee simple, in 1782 co-operated with the original friends to that measure, of whom I was one, in restoring to the Catholics the right of acquiring such a dominion in property; and we now are all convinced that the laws passed at these periods, instead of proving injurious to Ireland, most eminently contributed to the prosperity of this island, by adding strength to its yeomanry, and by restoring to this country some of its most ancient and respectable families, the property and talents of whom must otherwise have been devoted to the service of a foreign and perhaps hostile power.

If Gentlemen advert to the conduct of the Protestants of England last year, respecting the repeal of the Test-act, they must feel a stronger conviction of the necessity of guarding their minds against the influence of the apprehensions I mention; though the experience of twelve years has proved that the repeal of this act has not been attended with any bad consequences in this kingdom, yet the English Protestants have resisted the adoption of a similar measure, with all the vehemence and ardour, which we might expect they would have displayed against a direct attempt to subvert their Constitution in Church and State; and one of the most enlightened of the Clergy of their Established Church, in reply to the argument proving the innocuousness of the measure from the experience of Ireland, has asserted that every person informed in the political history of this kingdom knows, that Government in 1780 consented to the repeal of the Test-act under the terror of a Spanish invasion; an assertion which every man, who recollects the number of our Volunteer army, and the union of the people at that period, knows to be erroneous.

I must advert to a misconception, which appears to have prevailed very generally in this House, that an admission of Roman Catholics to a participation in the elective franchise must affect very materially the settlement of our Constitution at the Revolution of 1688.

If Gentlemen will consult our history, they will find that there was not any settlement of the Constitution of Ireland at that period; the security of our religion and property were the benefits which the Protestants of this kingdom derived from the Revolution; essential and important advantages, which justly entitle the event to commemoration; but the endeavours of a certain description of men in this House to obtain a participation in the benefits of the settlement of the Constitution of England at the Revolution, and in those measures for the

security of the rights and liberties of the subject, which grew out of that settlement, have been constantly and successfully resisted by the present British Minister; the act, by which the Roman Catholics were deprived of the elective franchise, was passed at a period long subsequent to the Revolution; it did not originate in any delinquency of the people of that persuasion, the law was enacted after an experience for twenty-five years of the peaceable conduct of the Roman Catholics; a conduct, which they have since uniformly pursued; untainted by the example of two rebellions in the sister kingdom; and when the short term of eighteen years was deemed sufficient to expiate the guilt of Scotch disloyalty; the Irish Catholic may with propriety and justice plead his allegiance and his penalties for a century, as an atonement for the crimes of his ancestors. In order to preserve unanimity, I wish that we should refrain from any explicit declarations respecting our conduct in future on the subject of Catholic claims; yet we ought not to extinguish hope in the minds of our fellow subjects; on the contrary let us hold out to our Roman Catholic brethren a participation in our Constitution, as a prize to be obtained by a firm perseverance in their allegiance to the Government of the country, and by unequivocal proofs of their affection for, and attachment to, the principles of the Constitution. The period for adjudging this prize cannot now be ascertained; it must depend on the experience of the effects of the law proposed to be passed this session, and on the circumstances of the country.

Mr. Egan. I had the honour, Mr. Chairman, to present that petition to this House: It was received by the concurrence of a majority—but if it is now to be rejected without any sort of investigation, I shall have to lament as a misfortune the circumstance of its coming before the House under my introduction.—But, Sir, I shall oppose the motion of the Right Hon. Gentlemen, whom I most highly respect, because I think it militates against the order and decorum of Parliament. If I thought it contained a single requisition having the slightest tendency to the subversion of the Protestant religion in Church or State, there is not a man in this House who would more firmly oppose it than I would—but seeing no such tendency—fearing no such danger, I shall vote for its committal.

I am not fond, Sir, of speaking of myself—but on this occasion I will say, that from my earliest rudiments of education, I was taught to entertain a bigotted reverence for the Protestant religion, to the prejudice of Popery;—but, Sir, if by the experience of years that bigotry is removed, and my mind liberalized by a more intimate knowledge of society—I hope it will not under these considerations, be suspected that I would offer to this House a measure disrespectful to its dignity or subversive to its principles.

When I brought in the petition, I used a language, I trust not unbecoming a Member of this House:—When I was called on to present it, I did not pledge myself to support its requisition;—and when called on to state its objects, I did not hazard from mere memory, any obscure statement that might be suspected to conceal any lurking demands,—but read it fully and fairly to the House, together with the names that were signed—names, Sir, of citizens amongst the most respectable in your metropolis—of traders amongst the most wealthy and important in your country; and let me say, Sir, as a lesson to *indiscretion*—that the sordid invectives attempted to be thrown against them this night will, instead of an odium, prove a panegyric on their characters; and let me conjure a Protestant House of Commons not to adopt a measure which shall sanction such invective.

Sir,

Sir, in presenting this petition I conceived myself as doing no more than my bounden duty as a Member of this House, in complying with the requisition of three millions of my countrymen and fellow subjects in the realm.—It was not only received with scarcely a negative, and ordered to lie on your table; but has been most ably supported by men with whom, if I could stoop to adulation, I would say it was my pride to be included even in error,—men whose support of the measure ought in my mind to sanctify its adoption.

The Right Hon. Member who has brought forward this motion, Sir, is a man for whose character and principles I hold the highest veneration; and I scruple not to say that in most matters, if to concur with him, rendered it necessary to forfeit the conviction of my own understanding, I would do it; but give me leave to say, Sir, that I trust the day is not far distant, when he and his friends will see their motives are founded on mis-apprehension.

I wish to be informed, Sir, if, when a Petition has been received by unanimous assent, and is so recorded upon your Journals, whether it is consistent with parliamentary order to reject it without investigation, or any cause alledged?—for my own part, Sir, I should think the motion would have been more orderly if it was for expunging the petition from your Journals;—in this matter, Sir, I speak with the greatest deference.

But, Sir, after all, is *rejection* a wise measure towards the petition of three millions of subjects—breathing humility, loyalty, affection, and attachment—to you—to their King—to their country—and to the State?—This petition, Sir, is not a *demand* of the elective franchise only:—It is an humble solicitation that the wisdom of this House would be pleased to remove certain disabilities, and to extend to them some participation in the blessings of the Constitution.—Yet you are *this* moment going to reject this petition, and in the *very next* to pass a Bill acquiescing in a very considerable part of the prayer of the petition!—

One would think, Sir, the Roman Catholics had been guilty of some new act of criminality calling for pointed censure; but if we look into their conduct and consult the language of their petition we shall find no ground for such conjecture;—we shall find in it nothing but the humble language of a respectable body of people submitting with patience to those very grievances from which they intreat relief. But we are told, Sir, that the Legislature of this country can *never* agree in the prayer of that petition—can never cede to the Roman Catholics the franchise of election—nor one of those various other immunities which their Protestant fellow subjects enjoy;—and we are told of preambles, and final resolutions that shall fix boundaries to the claim of Catholics—and to the concessions of Parliament!—But for God's sake, Sir, shall we, who are literally clad in mortality, presume to limit the wisdom of posterity, or circumscribe the rights or the liberality of future Parliaments?—Let us rather deprecate such acts of legislative folly, and not arrogate to ourselves a privilege which we deny to our predecessors. Such a piece of arrogance would be an eternal reflection on the wisdom of the House of Commons, and its folly must be obvious to the meanest capacity. What! Sir, at a time we are passing an act of Parliament to sooth the long suffering of the Roman Catholic, to attach his allegiance to the State, and his industry to the country; is it wise in this House to declare—that, *be their deserts what they may*, they shall notwithstanding, be FOR EVER cut off from the Rights of Men!!!—Why, Sir, this would be to say to the manly and constitutional ambition of three millions of Irish subjects—Exterminate yourselves, your talents, your property, and your industry for ever from this

this country, in which you can *never* hope for admission to the blessings of a free Constitution, or the ordinary rights of subjects!!!—Is this the Protestant language and the Protestant principle for which you are ready to spill your blood?—Or do you hold it consistent, in the very moment you are professing a wish to unite the affections of the people, thus to adopt the old principle of jealousy and division, which first distinguished English usurpation in this country, by shutting out the Irish people from the English *constitutional* pale.—It is to say to the loyal Roman Catholics of Ireland—bring with you all your merits, all your loyalty, all your fidelity, industry, and virtue—yet we will put the *extinguisher* of prophecy upon your hopes, and darken every ray of your expectations, by the gloom of despair.

A Right Hon. Member has said there are two ways of immortalizing ourselves on this occasion; I agree with him: we may do it by our wisdom and liberality, or by our bigotry and folly; but I am for preferring the former mode.

Let me ask the Ministers of the country, while they are seconding the measure brought forward in this House by an Hon. Baronet high in their confidence, which they have advised, will they be weak enough to sanction, with the opinion of Government, such a principle as shall for ever exclude three-fourths of the people of Ireland from the rights of subjects, and tell them they shall never participate the blessings of our Constitution?

For my own part, Sir, I am bound to declare, when I brought forward this petition, I was far from being actuated by seditious motives; convinced in my own mind of the principles and unshaken loyalty of that great and respectable body from whom it comes, I gave my sanction, with a view to their consolidation within the pale of the Constitution, believing most firmly that my success would prove the consolidation of Irish prosperity.

We have been told, Sir, that the Roman Catholics were deprived of the right of franchise under the principles of the Constitution, as established at the Revolution; but let me inquire whether ever such an infliction was held warrantable in that day? Let me vindicate the principles of our glorious Revolution—that second Magna Charta, from a charge so unjust; and let me tell Gentlemen that the elective franchise was not wrested from the Roman Catholics of Ireland, until fifty years after the Revolution, and this at a time when there was not in their demeanour the smallest foundation for a pretence to justify so severe a measure. But, Sir, admitting, for argument sake, that any such cause for disqualification did at any time exist—does it follow, that the effect must for ever continue, when the cause has ceased?—That posterity shall for ever suffer for the errors of their ancestors, which they abjure?—Or is it in the littleness of man, or the arrogance of Legislature to assume a power which even the Deity disclaims, and to perpetuate to succeeding generations, the punishment of crimes long buried with the guilty?

The movers of this motion have raised in this country an honourable monument to their own names, in an endeavour to rescue from vice and intemperance the morals and the industry of the people; and let me conjure them not now to sacrifice to the intemperance of a moment, the best incentives to the improvement of those morals and of that industry;—and let me also conjure this House to avoid an impolitical attempt to arrogate a power disgraceful to their own judgment, and insulting to posterity.

* Alluding to Mr. Latouche's motion in the House of Commons, in the Session 1791, for suppressing the inordinate use of spiritous liquors among the lower orders of people.

The Hon. *F. Hutchinson*. Sir, I rise under the impression of much concern; deeply sensible of the importance of the question, and feeling that my opinion differs intirely, and radically, from a great majority of those to whom I address myself.—But I think the time is now come, when every man ought to speak out; and I shall do so, regardless of any consequences, arising either from prejudice on the one hand, or popularity on the other.

I am sure the House will indulge me, while I state those reasons which govern my conduct on this night. However, before I enter into the question, I cannot avoid adverting to what has fallen from one of the principal law servants of the Crown, (the Solicitor General) who has been pleased to say, that he was glad the matter of the Catholic Petition has been agitated, because it was fitting that the Protestants of Ireland should know, who are to be trusted, and who are not to be trusted.

I am one of those who cannot be prevented from taking my part, by the pressure of such an observation. I will declare my sentiments as freely as they have arisen in mind; and I trust they are such as, notwithstanding the invidious observation of the Hon. Gentleman, will not be deemed to render me unworthy of the confidence of any description of the people.

I shall not utter any opinion, in the most remote degree inconsistent with the security of the present establishments, either in the Church or in the State—I venerate those establishments; and yield to no man in attachment to the Constitution; whose vigour I would restore, and whose equal and just principles I seek to re-establish.

I am persuaded, that in opposing the present motion, and the grounds upon which it has been supported, I am acting for the maintenance of the Dignity of Parliament—for the advancement of the true interests of this country—and not against the sense of the nation at large.

When the Hon. Baronet first brought in this Bill, a Right Hon. Gentleman (Mr. Ogle) rose in his place, and desired that the committal might be postponed to a late day. And he said, he made this proposition to the House on behalf of the Protestants of Ireland, that they might have time to consider of the measure, and to instruct their Representatives. The idea of my Right Hon. Friend was adopted. It was founded in wise precaution; and had too much National, and Parliamentary dignity, not to meet with universal approbation. The committal was deferred for nearly three weeks. That period was given for discussion. The sense of the nation was resorted to; and the result has been—a general acquiescence in favour of the Bill.

The apprehensions which had been expressed within these walls, did not excite the public mind. The bulk of the people, who have been long witnesses of the peaceable demeanor, and tried allegiance of their Catholic brethren, could not be prevailed upon to raise their voices in opposition to the intended liberality of Parliament.

They remembered the Catholic loyalty for this century past—in times of civil commotion, and national weakness—during two Rebellions—and while the succession to the Crown was disputed by force of arms, and hostile invasion.

They had themselves been witnesses of the situation of this country in the year 1779—that memorable æra, when the Minister of the day informed this House, that we could derive no assistance from the sister kingdom.

When the pride of Great Britain was almost humbled in the dust—her armies led captive—one of the brightest jewels of the imperial crown torn from the diadem:—At that moment, when the combined fleets

fleets of the two great Catholic powers of Europe, urged a descent upon our coasts, the people recollect from whom we derived our protection then—We found it in the support of three millions of our fellow citizens—in the spirit of our national character—and in the virtue of our Catholic brethren. We found them ready to sacrifice their fortunes and their lives in defence of that Constitution, from the rights of which they had been long excluded, without any imputation of crime—in a period of profound peace—and in violation of the national faith.

We saw them forgetful of the oppressions which they had endured, and remembering only the public danger.

Shall we now say, that those very persons, by whose assistance we saved the State, and restored the Constitution, deserve the reprehension of Parliament? for such is the obvious tendency of the present motion, because they desire to be admitted *under that State* to the *rights of citizens*.

Whatever may be the tone of Gentlemen within these walls, this is not the public feeling. The conduct of the Catholics in the hour of difficulty and danger, is not forgotten by the nation. And yet I have heard them on this night accused of sedition, and of an endeavour to disturb the Government. It is not difficult to utter the accusation—But I ask how this disposition appears? or why it is to be attributed to three millions of unoffending people, who are known to the State, only by their loyalty and their sufferings? Shall they be considered as seditious, because they desire to be admitted to some of the privileges which we possess, and which their ancestors inherited—to rights which are part of the Constitution—ascertained and guarded by the great charter, the fundamental law of the State? The charge is a national aspersion; it is answered by the history of your country, from the Revolution to the present day, and by the uniform experience of every one of you.

I cannot help expressing much concern at the manner in which this debate has proceeded. The subject does not appear to me to have been fairly stated, or argued upon true constitutional principles. The object of the petition has been misrepresented, and motives charged to the petitioners, which they are known not to entertain; imputations from which, a regard to the national character, which has been wounded through their sides, and the uniform tenor of their conduct for a century past ought to have protected them. In the place of calm investigation, we have heard little else but jealous accusations, and ill-placed doubts. Apprehensions with which it is difficult to reason, because there is nothing to combat, but a shadow, that vanishes as you approach it, and like the air-drawn dagger, eludes the grasp.

In speaking to this question, Gentlemen do not seem sufficiently to consider the peculiar situation of this country, nor to have turned their minds to that necessity, which is urging on, and must produce a reform in the system of Representation. I call upon you to reflect seriously within yourselves, whether the present system of exclusion ought to continue, or can be suffered to remain? Recollect that this is the only nation upon earth, in which the great body of the people are excluded, not only from all the civil establishments, but from those blessings which the *Constitution* confers.

The petitioners have approached this House with an humble and respectful application, desiring that persons of their persuasion may be restored to some share of the elective franchise. They claim a privilege attached by the Constitution to freehold property. And because they have made this claim, they are charged with having thereby manifested a desire to become the ruling power. And are said to have demanded

demanded from the Protestants, a surrender into their hands of the Government of the country.

Nothing contained in the petition can justify these charges. The misapprehension arises from not distinguishing between that franchise which the Constitution has annexed to freeholds; and those powers which compose the machine of the State.

The former is that right to which every citizen, possessing a certain kind of property, ought to be admitted. The latter consists in the Legislature, and the executive function.—In that authority which makes the law, and enforces its execution. In the former is to be found that vital principle, which gives animation and strength to the representative body, which *so constituted*, diffuses among the people, the blessings of equal protection, and equal liberty.

It is for this privilege the Catholics have laid before you their humble petition. In which they contend, not for any speculative right, but for the *representation of property*—That foundation upon which the British Constitution rests its weight.

The spirit of monopoly might have taken alarm, if they had sought to interfere with power in the hands of Protestants, with your exclusive rights, the proud dominion of your ascendancy in the government, with the honours or emoluments of the State; but those are not the objects which they seek:—they only appeal to your justice, to suffer them to return once more within the pale of the constitution.

They do not desire to become a part of the governing power.

To affix that meaning to their petition, is to confound what the petitions have not confounded;—the distinction between the constituent and the representative body.

I have heard them charged in the course of this debate, with an endeavour to force their way into the Houses of Parliament. But with what degree of justice this imputation is made, I leave to any reasonable mind to determine; when it is considered, that the only object of their petition is, that their property may be represented by *Protestant representatives*.

But this is not the question which now engages our attention. We are not debating whether the elective franchise shall be restored to the Catholics, but whether their petition shall be dismissed, by a vote of rejection? Whether the respectful and constitutional language of some of the principal commercial characters in the nation, who have addressed this House on behalf of themselves, and three millions of the people, shall be replied to with marked severity and unparliamentary disapprobation?

I have gone somewhat at large into the subject of this petition, for the purpose of shewing, that it does not desire any thing, inconsistent with the constitution; nor breathe any spirit, inimical to good government and sound policy. Confirmed as I am in this opinion, I do not see upon what ground the present motion can be maintained; and why the constant course of proceeding is now to be departed from. It is not usual for this House to answer petitions by specific resolutions:—the forms of Parliament are against it; and those forms are founded in wisdom, and confirmed by experience.

Gentlemen who argue for the rejection of this petition, cannot therefore attempt to justify their conduct on Parliamentary precedent—Upon the necessity, of giving a negative to every petition, by its rejection, upon which, they are not prepared, to found any measure of relief. To such an argument every page of your Journals, and the experience of every day, would furnish ample ground of contradiction.

This unusual and violent proceeding, can therefore only be vindicated on one or other of those grounds:—either because the petitioners are undeserving from their own conduct;—or because they have put forth requisitions, unconstitutional—and trenching upon the settled government in Church and State.—It cannot be upon the first ground, because, upon that, the history of your country, and your own experience, furnishes a full and ready refutation.—You know what the Catholics are, and what they have been in the most perilous times; and it cannot be justified on the latter, because what they have humbly desired, is but the restoration of their ancient franchise in part; which they enjoyed entire many years after the Revolution:—which survived for a period of forty years, in its full and perfect state, this æra of Catholic humiliation—and the pride, and the prejudice—and the jealousy of the Protestant legislator, in the hour of his triumph.

The advocates for the present motion have resorted to other topics in their defence. They were well aware, that according to the course of Parliament, they could not stand justified in rejecting a petition:—respectful in its manner, and constitutional in its import. And therefore, in order to furnish themselves with some colourable ground of argument, they have judged it necessary to misrepresent the object, and the conduct of the petitioners; and then with a candor, well suited to this mode of proceeding, they have argued, *from their own misrepresentations*, in support of the motion.

They have complained, that the petitioners have endeavoured to force their way into the State, and to push from their seats the Protestant legislators; because they have preferred a petition desiring to be admitted to some participation in the election of *Protestant representatives*.

I have heard some of you, on this night, charge the Catholics with imputations, which, you ought to have been ashamed to utter, and which, I trust, I shall never hear repeated within these walls.

If you had been satisfied with traducing the respectable individuals, who have subscribed to this petition, you would only have been guilty of private defamation;—but you have gone further;—you have imputed to your Catholic brethren, principles, of which you know, they are incable; and which are disavowed alike by the decency of their petition—and the loyalty of their conduct—you have mistated their claims; and you have branded *your own misrepresentations* with the name of sedition.

I charge you with having traduced the Catholic character—you have defamed the nation by villifying the great body of its people;—but I do not say that you have been inconsistent—you have not ill adapted your arguments to your cause. A proceeding of unjustifiable severity, disrespectful to the humble petitions of the people, and disgraceful to the dignity of Parliament; upheld by private slander, and public misrepresentation.

Mr. M. Smith, I shall certainly vote against the rejection of this petition, but will not, at the same time pledge myself to support its prayer, if that prayer shall come to be coolly and dispassionately canvassed; for though I look to the utmost extinction of the Penal Code, as to the consummation of this country's prosperity, yet I would not be understood to say, or to have said, that I thought the fulness of time was now come, when such a measure should take place. As to the question before the House, I confess I thought it had been precluded by our resolution of Saturday last—to receive the petition; for a resolution *to receive*, and a resolution *not to reject*, seemed to my humble understanding to be synonymous; but as

some

some very respectable Gentlemen entertain a different opinion, I am willing to surrender my sentiment upon the subject, and to adopt their's. It has been said that a rejection of this petition will be in no wise disrespectful to those in whose behalf it has been presented; but, Sir, I hold that such a measure will be not only highly disrespectful to those persons, but derogatory in a very great degree from the dignity of this House, and therefore I will oppose it to the utmost of my ability. Our country is divided into two great communities—the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. Their relative numbers I do not accurately know; nor, if I did know, would I be fond of stating; but the former is the ascendant, the latter the depressed party in the State. Thus circumstanced, the latter, in the humble garb and in the language of supplication, approach their ascendant fellow citizens, and pray to be admitted to such a participation of a great constitutional privilege, as the wisdom and justice of those applied to may suggest: And is this the petition, Sir, that ought to receive *no answer*? Is this a petition that we should not deign even to consider? Is it a petition that ought to be rejected, not only *without debate*, but *with disdain*? Believe me, Sir, if ever there was a time when this House was called upon to act, with calmness as well as firmness, with moderation as well as magnanimity, it is the present occasion. We are, as the ascendant body in the State, now solemnly called upon to sit in judgment upon the supplication, and to decide upon the important claim of our Roman Catholic fellow citizens, and shall we either decline the decision altogether, or enter upon it with heat, with passion, or with prejudice? Is there any other power upon earth to which the petitioners could apply? Is it unreasonable or unnatural that they should solicit what they seek? And shall we not, on this awful occasion, while we sit as judges upon the momentous claims and supplications of our fellow subjects, hear, *with patience hear*, and consider what may be urged in their behalf? Shall we abjure our own dignity, and insult their feelings by dismissing them from our bar unheeded and unheard? Sir, I wish the House to act with more kindness to them, and with more respect to itself. Let us at least consider their prayer; and if, on due deliberation, we shall deem a compliance with it inexpedient, let our refusal be signified with kindness, not with contempt; with dignity, but not with disdain. Let our decision be firm, but not insulting; and let it be such as while it *secures* us, may for the present at least *satisfy* them. Sir, Gentlemen have said, that a compliance with the prayer of this petition may not, for the present, be *expedient*; but I deny, utterly and absolutely deny, that it would be *unconstitutional*. Whence are we to date our constitution? Where shall we find the great foundation of it? Is it not in the Revolution of 1688? Then it was that our Constitution was fixed; then were all its *Palladia* defined and ensured; every thing deemed noxious to its vital principle was then removed, and nothing but what was held salutary was suffered to remain. From thence, therefore, we are to date the sanity, and the purity of our Constitution; and yet from thence down to the reign of George II. a period of little less than forty years, Roman Catholics were suffered to enjoy that franchise fully and entirely, the smallest portion of which, it is now said cannot be imparted to them without a surrender of the Constitution:—Was then our Constitution surrendered at the Revolution of 1688? Was it surrendered into the hands of Roman Catholics during the reigns of William III, and of Anne, when the Penal Code became the law of the land? or was the accession of the Brunswick family marked by a surrender of the Constitution of our country?

country? If to communicate any share of the elective franchise to Roman Catholics would be to betray our Constitution, then does it follow, of necessity, that during the whole of the period which I have mentioned, our constitution stood betrayed or unasserted. But it may be asked, where lies the difference between this measure's being *inexpedient* or *unconstitutional*? Sir, the difference is great indeed, and in my opinion, obvious; its being *inexpedient* is a reason against our imparting it *now*; but its being *unconstitutional* would be a justification for withholding it *for ever*. Hence it is, Sir, that I combat the unwarranted and the impolitic position that is laid down.—I deprecate the *perpetual* exclusion of our Roman Catholic brethren from an equal share of all our civil rights, and a free participation of the blessings of our constitution.

I know that such an exclusion is not within our power—but I must resist a doctrine which, if it were to have any effect, could only serve to mislead posterity, or to dishonour ourselves.

Those being my sentiments, Sir, I shall give my negative to the depending motion.

Mr. Graydon said, that, neither in the former debate of Saturday, nor, hitherto, in this, had he obtruded on the House any opinion respecting this great constitutional question, as he wished to hear, from great and respectable authorities on both sides of it, those sentiments and declarations, which the occasion would properly call forth, and which would assist them in either forming or connecting their judgment. Several gentlemen having, however, called upon Members to speak freely and decidedly their opinions, and one gentleman, having expressed himself, as conveying an intimation to the House, that all those, who voted against the rejection of the petition, voted, in reality, for communicating to the Roman Catholics a right of suffrage; he thought it necessary to rise and declare, in a few words, the best determination he could form on this subject.

He would premise what he had to say, by expressing his concern that he found himself obliged to differ on this question with the Right Hon. mover of it, a man, whose many and conspicuous public and private virtues had justly raised him to the rank of one of the first citizens of the State, but he could not argue with him, as to the prudence and expediency of treating the petition in the manner he had proposed. He would not hesitate to declare, in the most explicit terms, that in his judgment, the right of suffrage should not be, at this time, communicated to the Roman Catholics, because he was decidedly of opinion that such a communication, in the present state of this country and temper of the times, would either endanger the Protestant ascendancy, as it had been called, or prove destructive to the Roman Catholics themselves.—That body is not now prepared to receive or to exercise it with benefit to the country;—but at the same time, it would be unwise as wholly ineffectual, to say or to do any thing, which might seem to preclude them from participating in that right hereafter.—Any man, who considered the present state of this country, would clearly see that, if the principles of our constitution shall remain as they are at this day, the Roman Catholics must be admitted, in time, to what they at present solicit, rather prematurely.—The legislature has already opened to them the way to the acquisition of property, by all possible means, and four-fifths of the people of any country, pursuing that object through the road of industry, must obtain a proportionable share in the possession of the soil. Will any man say that four-fifths of the possessors of freeholds, or equivalents to freeholds, shall remain without representation in this country? the idea is too absurd to be
admitted

admitted for a moment—There cannot therefore remain a doubt that, in the common and ordinary progress of the acquisition of property, the Roman Catholics of this kingdom will become entitled to a large portion of legislative power in it. What then is the policy that wisdom would suggest to be pursued? To prepare their minds and fashion their political manners for the exercise of that power, when the day shall arrive that shall bring with it a necessity of communicating it to them.—We should do every thing, that may tend to associate them to their Protestant brethren, and assimilate their habits, their manners, and political opinions with ours: At the present time, such a communication of power would tend to the very reverse, it would set up distracted councils and divided interests, and introduce, between the two bodies, a struggle for ascendancy, before the Roman Catholic was prepared by the intermixing with Protestants, or sufficiently established in the landed interest of the country to feel that the true political objects of both were one and the same.

Thus a breach between the two, instead of a union, would be promoted, and it must terminate either in the overthrow of the present ruling power, or the destruction of the Roman Catholic growing one. The bill now before the House, will no doubt contribute much to further the principle of associating the two bodies, but the motion now made, so far as it goes, directly tends to the infringement of it—this must appear from considering the ordinary method of proceeding, in cases of a similar nature. Whenever a bill is introduced, all classes of people have a right to petition Parliament upon the subject of it. The petitioners are almost universally received; there is hardly an instance of rejection.—If the member, who introduces the petition, thinks it a proper subject of adoption, he takes it up, whilst the bill is depending, and moves that the committee, on the bill, may be empowered to receive a clause or clauses, pursuant to the prayer of the petition, any other member may do the same;—the object of the petition is then fairly before the House, and we are called upon to decide whether it be such a one as is admissible or not; but, as in the present instance, where such a step is not taken, the petition remains silently upon the table; no farther notice is had of it; the bill goes through the Committee, and the act, when it passes, is the proper and dignified answer of the House to the prayer of the petition.—Then why depart, in this case, from this grave, customary form? and why mark a petition, from so respectable a body of our fellow-subjects, with peculiar reprobation?—Such a departure from the common process will convey an appearance of intemperance and aversion, and, upon such an occasion, appearances, should be regarded as highly important, and we should carefully guard against even misrepresentation out of doors.—Every thing conciliatory, nothing irritating, should accompany the progress of the bill; all harsh manner of conducting it should be avoided; as contradictory to the avowed and apparent principle on which it is founded.—Besides, let us consider whether it will operate in effect against the intention of those who are most zealous for rejecting the petition, and who ground their treatment of it upon a desire to cut off the expectations of the Roman Catholics.—It is certain this question will not pass without a division. It is almost as certain, that the bill, now before the House, will pass unanimously.—How will this transaction then appear upon the votes?—that the House with one voice agreed to relax the laws that bear hard upon the Roman Catholics of this country, and that there were even some
who

who did not think it proper to reject a petition of theirs, which claimed the right of suffrage.

It therefore appeared to him extremely unwise to step aside from the usual mode of proceeding in this instance, tending to widen, instead of closing the difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and probably introducing consequences very detrimental to the common interest of both, without a possibility of producing any benefit to either.—He would, therefore, vote against rejecting the petition in this manner.

Mr. *Curran* was convinced of the rectitude of intention on the part of the Right Hon. mover of this question; but he feared the mode of rejection as abrupt, and its consequences as serious. What the petitioners asked, was merely such share in the constitution and elective franchise, as the House should think it wise to grant; and would it be decent to give an unqualified rejection to their request? He for his own part had no Roman Catholic connexions, and he trusted he had credit enough in that House to guard him from the suspicion of being disposed to gratify a wild spirit of innovation subversive of the constitution. But he thought when one part of the community were appealed to as judges in their own cause, their discussion should not be attended with a shout of victory; they should decide with coolness and moderation; for he should rather imitate the judge who dismisses with a sigh, than the victor who bears down his adversary, without deigning to examine his supplication. He was of opinion it was better the present motion should be withdrawn as unnecessary:—the petition had been received and ordered to lie on the table:—he therefore conceived the petition already disposed of, without any farther proceeding—for surely the House was not so low in public respect as that nothing was to be understood from its silence.—This mode of conveying its determination to the petitioners would, he thought, be the most proper and conciliating;—it would tell the Catholics “We feel you are not represented, we feel our own superiority, but we do not meanly exult in your depression; and we wish for the day when you may be found fully qualified for equality, though we do not clearly see it now.”—This would, in his idea, be better than an abrupt and irritating rejection—for if he were a friend to the wildest schemes of ambition attributed to the Catholics, he would recommend the rejection of the present petition—as such a measure could tend only to stimulate ambition to precipitancy—and excite passion and discontent where the contrary feelings were desirable.—There was a point of Catholic liberality and Protestant justice which must unite to form the bonds of Catholic emancipation, and on the present occasion he would adopt the dignified conduct of executive government, which does not proudly reject the measures of the two other branches of the legislature, but signifies its disapprobation by simply withholding its assent.

Mr. *Hardy* said, that in the course of his parliamentary existence, few things, indeed nothing almost, had given him so much concern as the debate which had taken place on this petition, and the mode in which it had been conducted. That the motion was well intended he could entertain no doubt, but that it could attain the objects it aimed at, he entertained but little expectation. His Hon. and learned friend (Mr. *Curran*) had appealed to the good sense and moderation of the House, in language so eloquent, and so conciliatory, as left him scarcely any thing to say on that head; and the learned gentleman behind him (Mr. *M. Smith*) had spoke with so much legal and historical knowledge, and such perspicuity on the subject,

subject, as was unanswerable. Other gentlemen had spoken in the course of the night; to whom he thought it necessary to make some reply to; a Right Hon. Gentleman (Mr. B. Conyngham) had said, he wished to hear the opinions of gentlemen, and that the House should speak out on the subject. He agreed with the Right Hon. Gentleman; he wished so too. But how speak out? Would the determination of the House, as to the elective franchise, whatever that determination might be, be accompanied with less dignity, or less acquiesced in, if the question was brought before them in a separate and regular form, than now, where it was so unexpectedly brought forward, and the House of Commons obliged to travel out of its way to give an opinion as to the elective franchise, which no Member of the House had called upon it to declare. The prayer of the petition went indeed to the franchise, and as it was evident to every man, that such a requisition would not now be complied with, the House, in his opinion took the wisest and safest mode of disposing of that petition, by suffering it to lie quietly on the table, and no proceedings to be had upon it. If this was the usual mode, he would ask why depart from that mode now, when not only the silence of gentlemen within doors upon the subject, but every circumstance of the times, and the peculiar situation of the petitioners, seemed to demand a prudent adherence to it. Had any extraordinary event taken place since Saturday, when the petition had been brought in, read with great form, and unanimously received, as that the minds of gentlemen should depart from their remarkable moderation and good humour of that day? He had heard of none, and whatever vote the House might come to that night, it was evident that gentlemen, many at least, thought with him on the subject, from the approbation with which they seemed to receive an honourable and learned Gentleman's (the Solicitor General) amendment over the way. The Hon. Gentleman's motion was unquestionably much better than the original one, though not perhaps exactly agreeable to parliamentary usage. As to the mode which he took to recommend it, he (Mr. Hardy) did not think it either congenial to the learned Gentleman's acknowledged philanthropy and good humour, or at all adapted to the spirit of the motion itself. The learned Gentleman set out with a very prudent and benign declaration that he would not tread in the steps of other gentlemen who had dwelt so much on former divisions and hostilities in this country. It was an invidious and ungrateful subject—he would have nothing to do with it. And how does the learned gentleman adhere to his declaration? By not only touching on the subject, but going into a detailed and very circumstantial history of the proceedings of James the Second's Parliament in Ireland, which, says he, attained your ancestors, confiscated the estates of the amiable and illustrious Duke of Ormond, and was guilty of all atrocious acts imaginable. Such was the learned Gentleman's prefatory speech to a most pacific amendment. Mr. Hardy said he deprecated all such appeals to the passions, instead of the understanding. If ever there was a time when moderation was peculiarly necessary, it was at present, firmness was equally so; the one did not exclude the other; proper firmness and true moderation were in fact the same. The House was called upon to decide on one of the most important political questions that could be imagined, not calmly, nor regularly, but in a sort of sudden tumultuous manner, perfectly inconsistent with the slow, temperate, deliberate attention which they had hitherto bestowed on the subject. Was every minute and subordinate clause of the bill to undergo the most anxious revision, and the most important circumstance in its whole history to be instantly

instantly decided on? Or could he, who had expressly stated on Saturday night, that if the bill contained any clause which mentioned the elective franchise, it should be postponed till next session, merely on account of the magnitude of such a question, now reject, in an instant, a petition, already entertained, because it touched on that subject. Was there not too much heat and violence in all this, and were these the proper qualities to enter into conference with such a number of our fellow subjects? The exordium of Cæsar's speech on the Cataline conspiracy, and the excellent advice which it contained, might, he thought, be justly given on this occasion. "*Omnes homines, qui de rebus dubiis consultant, ab odio, inimicitia, ira, vacuos esse decet.*" A Right Hon. Gentleman had said, "Let the Roman Catholics abandon their prejudices and we shall abandon ours." And certainly whilst such prejudices existed on both sides, it was not possible for the parties to come to a final amicable settlement. The question, therefore, with regard to the elective franchise, was at present, in fact, though silently, disposed of; and why then resort to this abrupt unnecessary rejection of the petition? As to the elective franchise, he saw no substantial reason against a Roman Catholic gentleman of property and respectability being intrusted with it; this, he spoke of now, abstractedly, for he scarcely expected (if he could judge from the completion of the present time) to see any such event taking place; however, he trusted in God, his child might live to see it; when by a gradual incorporation of all fellow subjects, of whatever religious denominations, the grosser errors and doctrines of Popery would be comparatively lost in the superior purity of the Protestant religion, and both parties attend to the great characteristic and precept of their common Christian faith, "Peace and good will towards men."

An Honourable Gentleman, (Mr. Pery) had spoken in an animated manner, of the promulgation, of some extraordinary political tenets, which he considered as inimical to all sound and sober government. Mr. Hardy said, he partly agreed with him, but it must be a weak constitution indeed which could not resist such attacks. As to the discussion of political questions, he always approved of for this reason, that truth was ultimately benefited by it. If men wrote servilely or absurdly, still they generally met with those who would answer them, and thus even their imbecility was made to contribute to the growth and to the extent of human reason.

Sir Robert Filmer was answered by Mr. Locke, and thus his nonsensical ideas, as to Government, were eventually the means of justifying the Revolution. It was therefore wise in every free Government to leave such publications to their own fate; if they contained any good in them, they would necessarily so far benefit mankind; if they did not, what could preserve them from oblivion, except the folly of noticing them?—As to the petition, he again repeated, he did not think himself justified in rejecting it, though as to the object of it, (the elective franchise) he was equally decided that it could not immediately be granted. In the present situation of the country it would be just the most impolitic step that any statesman could take. For, what was the duty of a statesman before he offered any great and original measure to the public? To consider what he must immediately hazard, and what he may eventually gain. In this case the tranquillity of the country would be instantly shaken to pieces, and on the other hand would be put in the balance, a privilege very imperfectly exercised, and under such restrictions as would

would not, in all probability, gratify the party to whom it was restored.—Not that he doubted that granting it in the manner proposed by some of the Roman Catholic community, would meet the wishes of the moderate amongst them.—He believed it would. But would it, fettered as it necessarily must be on its onset, gratify the more sanguine and violent, who, in times, heated like the present, and who generally, indeed always, leave the moderate, far behind them?—If he could judge from some publications it would not. Some Gentlemen in the course of the debate, had advanced a most extraordinary position indeed—They said “That in no possible situation of the country could the elective franchise be given to the Roman Catholics with any safety to the State.” Without animadverting on the extreme facility with which Gentlemen undertook to dispose of futurity in this manner, and to prescribe to other times, and other Parliaments, who without any violent effort of imagination might be presumed to view this question in a very different light from that in which it was then regarded; without dwelling on the happy tranquillity of mind with which Gentlemen could view the revolutions that were then going on in the world, and which might possibly touch this country in their progress, as well as others; waving all this, he should briefly observe that the Roman Catholic laws were not founded, like the Magna Charta, or the Petition of Right, on great principles of truth which must remain the same in all times, and all vicissitudes whatever; No—They were founded on policy merely, a policy which other times made it necessary to resort to certainly, but as the times altered and passed away, the policy should be altered and passed away also—Gentlemen therefore who insisted so much on the immutability of some particular Roman Catholic laws, were singularly unfortunate in selecting *them* as the objects of perpetual, unchanging regard; for, of all laws whatever, such laws, from the very nature of them, must be peculiarly, and necessarily most subject to change. He had spoken of the quiet of the country, and so convinced was he of the necessity, the absolute necessity of maintaining it, at all events, that there was nothing independent of the constitution, which he would not sacrifice to preserve it. In this he was sure he spoke like a friend to the people, who under the shade of that tranquillity, would gradually obtain their just consequence in the state, and so be enabled to oppose all its enemies, internal or otherwise; and he doubted not but the day would yet come, when the gentlemen of that House would be enabled to call in aid of their constitutional exertions, a yeomanry very different from the present, a yeomanry of decent knowledge, of comfortable circumstances, and alive to the feelings of freemen, and who would then exercise, with credit to themselves and advantage to their country, that elective franchise, which, if then thrown into their hands, wildly and indiscreetly, as some theorists suggested, would only prove an instrument in the hands of every ambitious, opulent neighbour, for the aggrandisement of that neighbour, and their own repeated humiliation. He concluded with declaring, that he was sorry the question had been brought forward, but as it was, he must give it his negative.

Colonel Hutchinson. I should not think of rising at this late hour of the night, were it not absolutely necessary from the part I took in a former debate.—I would rather incur the guilt of presumption, by pressing myself on the wearied attention of this House, than have it supposed, for a moment, that I had abandoned the ground on which I once stood.

During the course of this debate I have heard very extraordinary language from an honorable member, for whom I have long entertained

tained great personal regard and respect, language on which I shall not comment, because I hope never again to hear it repeated within these walls; but this much I must say, that the gentlemen, who signed that petition, are persons of property, respectability and character; Mr. Byrne alone pays 100,000*l.* a year duty to his majesty's revenue—the capital, which such a trade requires, must be large indeed, and gives *some* security for the peaceable and loyal conduct of him who possesses it—If there is a man in the world engaged from interested motives to preserve the tranquillity of a country, it is a merchant, who possesses a large floating property, which may vanish on the appearance of civil convulsion, or be entirely annihilated by the events of external warfare—This canvas of the personal merits and demerits of petitioners to this House is new parliamentary doctrine, and which ought not to be endured; we are the servants of the people, and not their masters—They have a right to petition us, provided they do it in a decorous, and respectful manner; and there is no man who contends that this is not a decorous, and respectful petition—Who will venture to appear before you, if he shall be obliged to endure this fiery ordeal, and to submit to such treatment?—Believe me it is a wretched employment for the Parliament of Ireland, to pass day after day, and night after night in libelling the great majority of the Irish nation.

Much applause has been given to the present bill, now before us—I am willing to give it some—I like its principle; it is the principle of concession to the Catholic body, which I admire and applaud—yet how far does it go? What does this boasted bill give? What restraints will remain after it has passed into a law?—No Catholic, however brave his spirit, or consummate his military talents, can command a company of foot in your service, nor, had he the enterprising genius of Cooke, or Columbus, could he command the smallest sloop in your fleet—If half of a county were his own estate, he could not preserve its peace by acting as a magistrate, or take care of his property by performing the duties of a grand juror—Such are some of the restraints under which the *happy, fortunate, and favoured* Catholic will still continue to labour.

It is said that they retain prejudices adverse to the constitution—What is meant by this assertion I have not sagacity sufficient to discover—It cannot surely be maintained, that there is any thing in their religion which makes them the natural enemies of a free and admirable form of government—In order to do away this aspersion, it will be unnecessary for me to have recourse to the writings of the French philosophers, to the eloquence of the French orators, to the actions of the French nation—The conduct of the Irish Catholics themselves is a sufficient answer to this unfounded insinuation—Did you not at a late period, when every thing that could be dear and honourable to you as a nation was at stake, find them in arms by your side, in order to recover that liberty, which they are not suffered to enjoy, and to regenerate that constitution, into whose pale they were not allowed to enter? In times of demand, and danger, they were your associates, your soldiers, your defenders; now in a moment of tranquillity, when you think you have no occasion for their services, you reject, and calumniate them—You called upon them in 1779 to assist you in recovering your commerce, in re-establishing your constitution, in defending your country against a foreign invasion—your call was a proof of your weakness, and of your fears—their obedience was a proof of their affection, and of their strength—Did they seize on a dangerous, and critical moment, in order to embarrass your affairs? Did they then remember the oppression or misery of ages? They saw in the estab-

lishment

disfranchisement of Protestant liberty, if not their own emancipation, at least the pride, and the glory of the country which had given them birth.

It is nonsense I am sure, to talk to you of gratitude, but I would address one word to your own understanding.

If the revolution of 1782 could not have been brought about but by the co-operation of the Catholic body, can there be any prosperity, any power, any real strength in Ireland, unless the Protestants condescend to coalesce with them, and all descriptions of men shall be knit together in the bonds of common union and common affection.

Gentlemen have talked of Papists, and of drawing swords—I almost hoped not to have heard such language used at this day—I answer it by saying, that the great body of Catholics in this kingdom by no means deserve that severe appellation—I believe the number of Papists to be few—they would be much fewer, if those of the established church were willing to think, and to speak of them with more liberality, and less misrepresentation—Fortunately for this country Catholic bigotry have not kept pace with Protestant prejudice—what is meant by drawing of swords I cannot tell; of this, I am convinced, and I call upon any man to deny it if he can, that his Majesty does not possess a more peaceable, and more loyal body of subjects, than the Catholics of Ireland—To prove this, my assertion would be unnecessary—I appeal to their conduct, to their tried conduct for a century—I defy malignity itself to impute any designs to them, which are hostile to the State, the Church, or the King.

Let me now revert to your conduct on this night.

The Catholics have presumed to state to you, (who, if not their representatives, are undoubtedly their legislators and governors) and to this their native country, the oppressions, and grievances, under which they labour—for such their conduct, you traduce their motives, you malign their characters, you talk of fears, which you do not feel, and of dangers, which you do not apprehend, and are willing to seize on this or that unauthorised expression of this or that unauthorised individual, in order to justify you in proscribing the whole Catholic body, and dismissing from your bar, with outrage, and indignation, the petition of three millions of your people—Are these the wise principles of the Protestant ascendancy? Are these the firm foundations of liberty, of truth, and security, on which it is built? Go one step farther—condemn them to hug their chains, order them not to feel as men—command them not to use their recollection, or their eye-sight; and not to remember the events of their own history, or that which has passed in their own times in America, and is now passing in France, and in Poland.

Something has been said of wild and innovating systems of reformation, and of factions existing in this country—For myself I will say, that I am no innovator, I belong to no faction.

(Here the Solicitor General rose to explain, that he did not any way allude to the honourable Member, but to that blasted society called United Irishmen. He was sorry he had sat down without calling those fellows to the bar, but he now pledged himself to the House that he would do it.)

Sir, resumed *Colonel Hutchinson*, I speak no language but my own—If any man in this country has infringed the laws, the laws are equal to punish him. It is peculiarly the duty of gentlemen in office to see

them enforced—I acknowledge with satisfaction, and with pride, that I have talked of the reformation of your penal code—I shall continue to talk this language to you as long as I continue to exist; for in that reformation alone I see the future prosperity of my country, and that prosperity I value more than life—equal to honor.

Mr. *Grattan*. I find myself under difficulty to express how much I regard the mover, and condemn the motion. It is a measure as strong and as violent as any ever perhaps propounded in Parliament. You are to reject a petition, which you have received already, decorous in its manner, regular in its introduction, and respectable from its signatures. You reject it, because it comes from a great body of Roman Catholics, and applies, on behalf of that body, for some small share of freedom. This you are not only to refuse, but extinguish the principle—you are not only to disappoint, but insult the petitioner. You put the rejection on grounds which, you know, are fictitious. You say this House must answer the petition. Then I am to understand, every petition with which you do not comply, you are to reject by way of answer.—There is a petition now before you touching the improvement of the brewery, which you have not rejected nor complied with; the petitions last year against the police, of all the corporations of Dublin, Did you reject them? *Did you* comply with them?

But there is another petition on our table—a petition from the capital of Ulster—a petition from the most rising, spirited, and commercial town in the kingdom, Belfast, that goes infinitely farther than the Roman Catholic, in their prayer for indulgences. This petition, on a division, you received. The humble petition of the Catholics you reject; or is it proposed, in order to preserve consistency, to reject the Belfast petition as well as the Catholic, and thus commit a violence on the Protestant as well as the Catholic subject? on the first for desiring freedom for his fellow-citizen, and on the last for desiring it for himself?

The English Parliament in its inveteracy towards the Americans, did not go this length.—They did not reject the petitions of the Americans. There were some Members who did, indeed, talk as you have done, with respect to the persons of the Americans.—They derided Hancock and his crew, or Adams and his crew, as some here have derided Mr. Byrne and his associates. I was concerned and ashamed to hear certain observations on the names and conditions of the petitioners, and more concerned to find such observations received and echoed by the other side of the House, with applause and triumph. The first name to that petition, is one of the first merchants in Ireland; his credit would go farther than the character of most of our modern courtier placemen: the others, who have been outraged, are men of property, respectability, of honest and useful application to extend your trade, for the exercise of which they are now the subject of your derision. What Catholic in this country will ever be a merchant? or what merchant a petitioner, if he is to undergo this fiery ordeal, and to be the subject of scorn of the Commons, because he has been an instrument and promoter of commerce? It is not so in England.—I do not hear that the great merchants there are lightly treated or outraged by the ministerial part of the House of Commons in England: that Mr. Thornton and Mr. Long have been a subject of disrespect. I do not remember to have read that Alderman Beckford or Sir John Barnard met with any such treatment; and yet it is much more improper in the case of merchants subscribing the petition, because they are not present nor represented, and therefore are not

not protected, and in a peculiar manner intitled to your liberality.—A right honorable Member (high in confidence) from whose quarter of the House this intemperate disrespect, and noise proceeded, has informed you that the petition was conceived with a view to defeat the Bill. Sir, the right honorable Member is wholly unfounded in the charge, and he ought to be particularly cautious to avoid reflections on the people of this country. It is not the province of a Lord Lieutenant's Secretary to make animadversions; prejudicial to the reputation even of the Roman Catholics of this country. They too are subjects to be defended against insinuations, as well as injuries and outrage.—I therefore feel myself under the necessity of observing on the right honorable Member, so far as to say, that his charge was highly improper and entirely unfounded; and I must further add, that whenever any assault is made on the character of the commercial part of this country by a cry even in this House, I will not be wanting to rebuke such levity.

The matter of the petition has been much misrepresented as well as the character of the petitioners. It has been stated that it is an application to establish a Catholic Parliament.—Sir, it is an application to be permitted to vote at elections, and not to sit in Parliament; and it is an application for such a share of that elective franchise as shall bear no proportion to your's, and therefore it is an application for some share of the blessings of the Constitution, under the Protestant Ascendancy, not in opposition to it. Calculate, condescend to reckon what would be the number of the Protestant and Catholic voters, if that share in the proportion desired was granted, and you will find the result to be the opposite to your conclusion;—you will find that the proportion of suffrage is out of all comparison greater than the Catholic; that is you will find Protestant Ascendancy preserved, and Catholic freedom permitted; or, in other words, you will find their liberty is your strength, and you will find, you are not afraid of losing your constitutional power, but of adding to it; that your panic does not suffer your understanding to perceive your own weakness, or provide for your own strength; just as your property in land is better secured by their share of property in land, so your property in the Constitution is better secured by their share of property in the Constitution. This very principle, which is the principle of their petition, is the preamble of your own law:—Whereas it must tend to the prosperity of this kingdom to admit subjects of every denomination; into what? A share in the blessings of our free Constitution. In fine, does it not depend upon you what share they shall have, and may not you secure your own proportion of power, and their proportion of freedom; but it is said, if they have any share, however small, in the Constitution, they will get at last the Ascendancy?—What proof is there offered of this? what proof attempted?—None—Mere assertion, the assertion of panic, and if it has any meaning at all except panic and weakness, it means, that if you give the Catholics share in the blessings of your Constitution, they will, by that intermixture, assimilate to you;—that is, they will be in politics Protestant, and then you yourselves may perhaps be inclined to go further.

It is not always possible to refute objections by example as well as reason, but the objection now under consideration, is refuted by both. The experiment has been made, whether giving the elective franchise is an amount to giving them seats in Parliament; they had that elective right near half a century after the revolution;—they had it in the Parliament that sat in the reign of King William;—
they

they had it in the Parliament that sat in the reign of Anne; they had it in the Parliament that sat in the reign of George the 1st. and they had it in the Parliament that sat in the reign of George the 2d. The first Parliament that sat in Ireland since the Revolution in which the Roman Catholics had not the elective franchise, was the first of the present reign: it follows from this example, that the elective franchise, so far from securing to them the right of sitting in Parliament, was not able to secure the right of voting at elections;—they lost that right in the commencement of George the 2d.'s reign, after having possessed it for 37 years since the Revolution; from hence I conclude that you are more alarmed than you need be, and that if the time was ripe for it, you might so qualify that franchise, or, in the words of your own act of Parliament, give them a share in the blessings of the Constitution with much safety, and much strength to the Protestant Ascendancy. If the principle I uphold is erroneous, it is the error and the precise expression in the preamble in your act of Parliament.

A right honorable Gentleman has said, that a man is not therefore a slave, because he has not a vote: It is true a man who has no property to be taxed is not a slave, when property is taxed without his consent, because he is not taxed; but the Catholic who has property is taxed, and then the argument of the member is that a Catholic, though taxed without his consent, and a Protestant not taxed at all, are alike;—that the Catholic body are in the situation of that Protestant who has neither lands, tenements, or hereditaments, therefore free.

The Revolution has been much insisted on, and much misunderstood. Gentlemen speak of the Revolution as the measure and limit of our liberty.—The Revolution in Ireland was followed by two events, the loss of trade, and the loss of freedom to the Protestant; and the cause of such losses was our religious animosity. It was not attended by the loss of the elective franchise to the Papist. If, then, the Revolution is the common measure of the condition of both sects, two extraordinary results would follow, that the Protestants should not recover their trade or freedom, and that the Catholics should not lose their franchise; but the virtue of the Revolution in Ireland was its principles, which were for a century checked in this country, but which did at last exert themselves, and inspire you to re-establish your liberty, and must at last prompt you to communicate a share of that liberty to the rest of the Irish. The Revolution in Ireland, properly understood, is a great and valiant principle of freedom; as misunderstood, it is a measure and entail of bondage.

The part of the subject which I shall now press upon you, is the final and eternal doom to which some gentlemen propose to condemn the Catholic. Some have said they must never get the elective franchise. What never be free? 3,000,000 of your people condemned by their fellow subjects to an everlasting slavery in all changes of time, decay of prejudice, increase of knowledge, the fall of papal power, and the establishment of philosophic and moral ascendancy in its place!—Never be free!—Do you mean to tell the Roman Catholic, it is in vain you take oaths and declarations of allegiance; it would be in vain even to renounce the spiritual power of the Pope, and become like any other dissenter—it will make no difference as to your emancipation. Go to France; Go to America; carry your property, industry, manufactures and family to a land of liberty; this is a sentence which requires the power of a God and the malignity of a dæmon;—you are not competent to pronounce it;—believe me, you may as well plant your foot on the earth, and hope by that resistance to stop the diurnal revolution which advances you to that morning sun, which is to shine alike on the

the Protestant and the Catholic, as you can hope to arrest the progress of that other light, Reason and Justice, which approach to liberate the Catholic, and liberalize the Protestant. Even now the question is on its way, and making its destined and irresistible progress, which you, with all your authority, will have no power to resist; no more than any other great truth, or any great ordinance of nature, or any law of motion which mankind is free to contemplate, but cannot resist; there is a justice linked to their cause, and a truth that sets off their application.

This debate is a proof of it, scarce had gentlemen declared the franchise never should be given, when they acknowledge it must, but in such time as the Catholic mind is prepared; then we are agreed, that Catholics may with safety to the Protestant Ascendancy, be admitted to the right of voting, provided they are enlightened Catholics, and we must of course, by that argument, admit that such Catholics as are now enlightened, may with safety be now admitted; thus in the course of two nights debate, have the two great arguments for their exclusion been surrendered, danger to the Revolution and to the Ascendancy. It is their ignorance, you now say, not their religion which is dangerous, and thus the question becomes a point of moral capacity, not of religion; whether for instance, Catholics of property are in as fit a state of moral capacity to exercise the right of franchise as a 40 shilling freeholder—You have in the course of this night, defended the Protestant Ascendancy, a Protestant King, a Protestant Church, a Protestant Parliament, and a Protestant Constituency; here you draw your lines of circumvallation, but you demolish this work, and defy this definition, when you allow that hereafter that constituency, when well instructed, may in some proportion be Catholic. The Protestant Ascendancy, then, by your admission, don't require a constituency purely Protestant, but compounded of such men as are civilized substantial freeholders. By the Constitution of this country, land should be represented: the land, therefore, should be in the hands of a Protestant constituency. If, then, your definition is true in its principle, it must be extended, and you must say, that the Protestant Ascendancy requires that all the land, as well as all the votes, should be Protestant; and this principle will extend to commerce; and then you must say, that the Protestant Ascendancy requires that all the commerce, as well as all the land and all the votes, should be in the possession of Protestants, until at last you sweep the Catholics off the face of the island.—The idea of this definition would rest the Protestant state on a sect, not on a people; that is, it would make its base narrow, in order to make its head secure;—a small foundation and a great superstructure; Protestant monopoly, distinct from, and fatal to, Protestant Ascendancy. You have already permitted the Catholics to purchase land; they are now the numbers, and by your law, they may be a considerable portion of landed property; your prudence then would provide, that this union of numbers and landed property, shall have no interest in Protestant freedom, and this you do for the better assuring and preserving the same; you see we adopt names which we do not understand, and set them against things which we might understand. We set up the name of Protestant Ascendancy against Protestant power, just as we set up the name Revolution against Protestant freedom. The Church has been forgotten no more than the State, and it has been insisted on, that if the Catholics get freedom, they will exercise it to substitute the establishment of their religion in the place of ours. The example of the Presbyterians refutes that argument; they are the majority of Protestants, and they have not destroyed our Church establishment. But the argument in its principles is erroneous. Men cannot be free without suffrage, but men may be free without Church establishment; and therefore

therefore they may be satisfied with the possession of the one; and not dissatisfied without the possession of the other. I have given my sentiments on this the other night. I see no reason to change them. I am not for precipitating any measure, but loving you as I do, I have thought it necessary to lay before you the whole of your situation, and to resist that tide of error which carries away all recollection, I have given my reasons; hereafter your mind will open; and we shall unite Protestant power with Catholic freedom.

I N T H E H O U S E O F L O R D S,

The Day the Bill passed, Lord DONOUGHMORE spoke as follows:

I rise to release the House, from the apprehension of debate.—It is not my wish to force a discussion which your Lordships appear so much to *deprecate*. You are about to give the Catholic valuable concessions—I am willing to rate your liberality high—I am ready to sacrifice somewhat to your prejudices, and much to the pride of your Ascendancy—I am satisfied to leave the noble Earl (Lord Aldborough) in the peaceful possession of his ancestors—and if there is any amongst you (supposed he applied to Lord Enniskillen) who would still cling to the old principle of severity and restriction, against the liberality of his present practice, I leave to such Noble Lords the defence of their favourite system of *benevolence*, of *union*, and of *charity*.

Having no amendment to propose, it is not necessary for me to detain your Lordships with a statement of my reasons for agreeing to a Bill which has the unanimous approbation of the House.—But, feeling those sentiments of approbation as strongly as any Noble Lord, and yielding to no man in attachment to those for whose relief it is intended, I wish to mark this measure with peculiar respect in every stage of its progress, and by a full attendance of the House, to give, if possible, additional weight to its unanimity.

I will *put in practice* those sentiments of conciliation which some of your Lordships are satisfied with *professing*. I will let those angry passions rest, which, I am ashamed to see, it is, are to irritate.—But I have a right to expect equal measure for the Catholic;—and I have, therefore, to regret, that it should have been thought necessary, by any noble Lord, to *insult*, in the moment of *liberality*; to mix *contumely* with *concession*; and to dispatch the whole Catholic persuasion*, and all its professors, with one stroke of indiscriminating reprobation.—But, happily, the generality of the censure of the most reverend prelate has deprived it of its effect.—The poison contains its own antidote—and I will not insult your understanding by vindicating the Irish Catholic against an imputation, which would stigmatize alike every member of his church, and embrace in its wide grasp of undistinguishing proscription the greater portion of the Christian World.

The measure brought forward by this bill contains a great principle of national policy. Upon this ground I am decidedly of opinion, that it ought to receive a full discussion.—But I observe that your Lordships have a different impression on your minds.—I shall therefore acquiesce; for my purpose is to conciliate. I will not force myself upon the House—I do not *provoke* discussion but I *await* it.

The question was then put from the Woolstack, and the bill passed *nemine dissentiente*.

* Alluding to the Bishop of Cashel's declaration—that the Roman Catholic religion was a religion for fools and knaves.